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THE SIEGE OF LONDON

MADAME DE MAUVES



THE SIEGE OF LONDON

MADAME DE MAUVES

BY

HENRY JAMES

London

MACMILLAN AND CO.

1883

Printed by R. & R. CLARK, Edinburgh.

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THE SIEGE OF LONDON

THE SIEGE OF LONDON.

I.

THAT solemn piece of upholstery, the curtain of the Comédie Française, had fallen upon the first act of the piece, and our two Americans had taken advantage of the interval to pass out of the huge hot theatre, in company with the other occupants of the stalls. But they were among the first to return, and they beguiled the rest of the intermission with looking at the house, which had lately been cleansed of its historic cobwebs, and ornamented with frescoes illustrative of the classic drama. In the month of September the audience at the Théâtre Français is comparatively thin, and on this occasion the drama—*L'Aventurière* of Emile Augier—had no pretensions to novelty. Many of the boxes were empty, others were occupied by persons of provincial or nomadic appearance. The boxes are far from the stage, near which our spectators were placed; but even at a distance Rupert Waterville was able to appreciate certain details. He was fond of appreciating details, and when he went to the theatre he looked about him a good deal, making use of a dainty but remarkably powerful glass. He knew that such a course was wanting in true distinction, and that it was indelicate to level at a lady an

instrument which was often only less injurious in effect than a double-barrelled pistol ; but he was always very curious, and he was sure, in any case, that at that moment, at that antiquated play—so he was pleased to qualify the masterpiece of an Academician—he would not be observed by any one he knew. Standing up, therefore, with his back to the stage, he made the circuit of the boxes, while several other persons, near him, performed the same operation with even greater coolness.

“Not a single pretty woman,” he remarked at last to his friend ; an observation which Littlemore, sitting in his place and staring with a bored expression at the new-looking curtain, received in perfect silence. He rarely indulged in these optical excursions ; he had been a great deal in Paris, and had ceased to care about it, or wonder about it, much ; he fancied that the French capital could have no more surprises for him, though it had had a good many in former days. Waterville was still in the stage of surprise ; he suddenly expressed this emotion. “By Jove !” he exclaimed ; “I beg your pardon—I beg *her* pardon—there is, after all, a woman that may be called”—he paused a little, inspecting her—“a kind of beauty !”

“What kind ?” Littlemore asked, vaguely.

“An unusual kind—an indescribable kind.” Littlemore was not heeding his answer, but he presently heard himself appealed to. “I say, I wish very much you would do me a favour.”

“I did you a favour in coming here,” said Littlemore. “It’s insufferably hot, and the play is like a dinner that has been dressed by the kitchen-maid. The actors are all *doublures*.”

“It’s simply to answer me this : is *she* respectable, now ?” Waterville rejoined, inattentive to his friend’s epigram.

Littlemore gave a groan, without turning his head.

"You are always wanting to know if they are respectable. What on earth can it matter?"

"I have made such mistakes—I have lost all confidence," said poor Waterville, to whom European civilisation had not ceased to be a novelty, and who during the last six months had found himself confronted with problems long unsuspected. Whenever he encountered a very nice-looking woman, he was sure to discover that she belonged to the class represented by the heroine of M. Augier's drama; and whenever his attention rested upon a person of a florid style of attraction, there was the strongest probability that she would turn out to be a countess. The countesses looked so superficial, and the others looked so exclusive. Now Littlemore distinguished at a glance; he never made mistakes.

"Simply for looking at them, it doesn't matter, I suppose," said Waterville, ingenuously, answering his companion's rather cynical inquiry.

"You stare at them all alike," Littlemore went on, still without moving; "except indeed when I tell you that they are not respectable—then your attention acquires a fixedness!"

"If your judgment is against this lady, I promise never to look at her again. I mean the one in the third box from the passage, in white, with the red flowers," he added, as Littlemore slowly rose and stood beside him. "The young man is leaning forward. It is the young man that makes me doubt of her. Will you have the glass?"

Littlemore looked about him without concentration. "No, I thank you, my eyes are good enough. The young man's a very good young man," he added in a moment.

"Very indeed; but he's several years younger than she. Wait till she turns her head."

She turned it very soon—she apparently had been speaking to the *ouvreuse*, at the door of the box—and

presented her face to the public—a fair, well-drawn face, with smiling eyes, smiling lips, ornamented over the brow with delicate rings of black hair and, in each ear, with the sparkle of a diamond sufficiently large to be seen across the Théâtre Français. Littlemore looked at her; then, abruptly, he gave an exclamation. “Give me the glass!”

“Do you know her?” his companion asked, as he directed the little instrument.

Littlemore made no answer; he only looked in silence; then he handed back the glass. “No, she’s not respectable,” he said. And he dropped into his seat again. As Waterville remained standing, he added, “Please sit down; I think she saw me.”

“Don’t you want her to see you?” asked Waterville the interrogator, taking his seat.

Littlemore hesitated. “I don’t want to spoil her game.” By this time the *entr’acte* was at an end; the curtain rose again.

It had been Waterville’s idea that they should go to the theatre. Littlemore, who was always for not doing a thing, had recommended that, the evening being lovely, they should simply sit and smoke at the door of the Grand Café, in a decent part of the Boulevard. Nevertheless, Rupert Waterville enjoyed the second act even less than he had done the first, which he thought heavy. He began to wonder whether his companion would wish to stay to the end; a useless line of speculation, for now that he had got to the theatre, Littlemore’s objection to doing things would certainly keep him from going. Waterville also wondered what he knew about the lady in the box. Once or twice he glanced at his friend, and then he saw that Littlemore was not following the play. He was thinking of something else; he was thinking of that woman. When the curtain fell again he sat in his place, making way for his neighbours, as usual, to edge past him, grinding his knees—his legs were long—with

their own protuberances. When the two men were alone in the stalls, Littlemore said: "I think I should like to see her again, after all." He spoke as if Waterville might have known all about her. Waterville was conscious of not doing so, but as there was evidently a good deal to know, he felt that he should lose nothing by being a little discreet. So, for the moment, he asked no questions; he only said—

"Well, here's the glass."

Littlemore gave him a glance of good-natured compassion. "I don't mean that I want to stare at her with that beastly thing. I mean—to see her—as I used to see her."

"How did you use to see her?" asked Waterville, bidding farewell to discretion.

"On the back piazza, at San Diego." And as his interlocutor, in receipt of this information, only stared, he went on—"Come out where we can breathe, and I'll tell you more."

They made their way to the low and narrow door, more worthy of a rabbit-hutch than of a great theatre, by which you pass from the stalls of the Comédie to the lobby, and as Littlemore went first, his ingenuous friend behind him could see that he glanced up at the box in the occupants of which they were interested. The more interesting of these had her back to the house; she was apparently just leaving the box, after her companion; but as she had not put on her mantle it was evident that they were not quitting the theatre. Littlemore's pursuit of fresh air did not lead him into the street; he had passed his arm into Waterville's, and when they reached that fine frigid staircase which ascends to the Foyer, he began silently to mount it. Littlemore was averse to active pleasures, but his friend reflected that now at least he had launched himself—he was going to look for the lady whom, with a monosyllable, he appeared to have classified. The young man resigned himself for the

moment to asking no questions, and the two strolled together into the shining saloon where Houdon's admirable statue of Voltaire, reflected in a dozen mirrors, is gaped at by visitors obviously less acute than the genius expressed in those living features. Waterville knew that Voltaire was very witty; he had read *Candide*, and had already had several opportunities of appreciating the statue. The Foyer was not crowded; only a dozen groups were scattered over the polished floor, several others having passed out to the balcony which overhangs the square of the Palais Royal. The windows were open, the brilliant lights of Paris made the dull summer evening look like an anniversary or a revolution; a murmur of voices seemed to come up from the streets, and even in the Foyer one heard the slow click of the horses, and the rumble of the crookedly-driven fiacres on the hard smooth asphalt. A lady and a gentleman, with their backs to our friends, stood before the image of Voltaire; the lady was dressed in white, including a white bonnet. Little more felt, as so many persons feel in that spot, that the scene was conspicuously Parisian, and he gave a mysterious laugh.

"It seems comical to see her here!" The last time was in New Mexico."

"In New Mexico?"

"At San Diego."

"Oh, on the back piazza," said Waterville, putting things together. He had not been aware of the position of San Diego, for if, on the occasion of his lately being appointed to a subordinate diplomatic post in London, he had been paying a good deal of attention to European geography, he had rather neglected that of his own country.

They had not spoken loud, and they were not standing near her; but suddenly, as if she had heard them, the lady in white turned round. Her eye caught Waterville's first, and in that glance he saw that if she had heard

them it was not because they were audible but because she had extraordinary quickness of ear. There was no recognition in it—there was none, at first, even when it rested lightly upon George Littlemore. But recognition flashed out a moment later, accompanied with a delicate increase of colour and a quick extension of her apparently constant smile. She had turned completely round; she stood there in sudden friendliness, with parted lips, with a hand, gloved to the elbow, almost imperiously offered. She was even prettier than at a distance. “Well, I declare!” she exclaimed; so loud that every one in the room appeared to feel personally addressed. Waterville was surprised; he had not been prepared, even after the mention of the back piazza, to find her an American. Her companion turned round as she spoke; he was a fresh, lean young man, in evening dress; he kept his hands in his pockets; Waterville imagined that he, at any rate, was not an American. He looked very grave—for such a fair festive young man—and gave Waterville and Littlemore, though his height was not superior to theirs, a narrow, vertical glance. Then he turned back to the statue of Voltaire, as if it had been, after all, among his premonitions that the lady he was attending would recognise people he didn’t know, and didn’t even, perhaps, care to know. This possibly confirmed slightly Littlemore’s assertion that she was not respectable. The young man was, at least; consummately so. “Where in the world did you drop from?” the lady inquired.

“I have been here some time,” Littlemore said, going forward, rather deliberately, to shake hands with her. He smiled a little, but he was more serious than she; he kept his eye on her own as if she had been just a trifle dangerous; it was the manner in which a duly discreet person would have approached some glossy, graceful animal which had an occasional trick of biting.

“Here in Paris, do you mean?”

“No; here and there—in Europe generally.”

"Well, it's queer I haven't met you."

"Better late than never!" said Littlemore. His smile was a little fixed.

"Well, you look very natural," the lady went on.

"So do you—or very charming—it's the same thing," Littlemore answered, laughing, and evidently wishing to be easy. It was as if, face to face, and after a considerable lapse of time, he had found her more imposing than he expected when, in the stalls below, he determined to come and meet her. As he spoke, the young man who was with her gave up his inspection of Voltaire and faced about, listlessly, without looking either at Littlemore or at Waterville.

"I want to introduce you to my friend," she went on. "Sir Arthur Demesne—Mr. Littlemore. Mr. Littlemore—Sir Arthur Demesne. Sir Arthur Demesne is an Englishman—Mr. Littlemore is a countryman of mine, an old friend. I haven't seen him for years. For how long? Don't let's count!—I wonder you knew me," she continued, addressing Littlemore. "I'm fearfully changed." All this was said in a clear, gay tone, which was the more audible as she spoke with a kind of caressing slowness. The two men, to do honour to her introduction, silently exchanged a glance; the Englishman perhaps coloured a little. He was very conscious of his companion. "I haven't introduced you to many people yet," she remarked.

"Oh, I don't mind," said Sir Arthur Demesne.

"Well, it's queer to see you!" she exclaimed, looking still at Littlemore. "You have changed, too—I can see that."

"Not where you are concerned."

"That's what I want to find out. Why don't you introduce your friend? I see he's dying to know me!"

Littlemore proceeded to this ceremony; but he reduced it to its simplest elements, merely glancing at Rupert Waterville, and murmuring his name.

"You don't tell him *my* name," the lady cried, while Waterville made her a formal salutation. "I hope you haven't forgotten it!"

Littlemore gave her a glance which was intended to be more penetrating than what he had hitherto permitted himself; if it had been put into words it would have said, "Ah, but *which* name?"

She answered the unspoken question, putting out her hand, as she had done to Littlemore, "Happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Waterville. I'm Mrs. Headway—perhaps you've heard of me. If you've ever been in America you must have heard of me. Not so much in New York, but in the Western cities. You *are* an American? Well, then, we are all compatriots—except Sir Arthur Demesne. Let me introduce you to Sir Arthur. Sir Arthur Demesne, Mr. Waterville—Mr. Waterville, Sir Arthur Demesne. Sir Arthur Demesne is a member of Parliament; don't he look young?" She waited for no answer to this question, but suddenly asked another, as she moved her bracelets back over her long, loose gloves. "Well, Mr. Littlemore, what are you thinking of?"

He was thinking that he must indeed have forgotten her name, for the one that she had pronounced awakened no association. But he could hardly tell her that.

"I'm thinking of San Diego."

"The back piazza, at my sister's? Oh, don't; it was too horrid. She has left now. I believe every one has left."

Sir Arthur Demesne drew out his watch with the air of a man who could take no part in these domestic reminiscences; he appeared to combine a generic self-possession with a degree of individual shyness. He said something about its being time they should go back to their seats, but Mrs. Headway paid no attention to the remark. Waterville wished her to linger; he felt in looking at her as if he had been looking at a charming

picture. Her low-growing hair, with its fine dense undulations, was of a shade of blackness that has now become rare; her complexion had the bloom of a white flower; her profile, when she turned her head, was as pure and fine as the outline of a cameo.

"You know this is the first theatre," she said to Waterville, as if she wished to be sociable. "And this is Voltaire, the celebrated writer."

"I'm devoted to the Comédie Française," Waterville answered, smiling.

"Dreadfully bad house; we didn't hear a word," said Sir Arthur.

"Ah, yes, the boxes!" murmured Waterville.

"I'm rather disappointed," Mrs. Headway went on.

"But I want to see what becomes of that woman."

"Doña Clorinde? Oh, I suppose they'll shoot her; they generally shoot the women, in French plays," Littlemore said.

"It will remind me of San Diego!" cried Mrs. Headway.

"Ah, at San Diego the women did the shooting."

"They don't seem to have killed you!" Mrs. Headway rejoined, archly.

"No, but I am riddled with wounds."

"Well, this is very remarkable," the lady went on, turning to Houdon's statue. "It's beautifully modelled."

"You are perhaps reading M. de Voltaire," Littlemore suggested.

"No; but I've purchased his works."

"They are not proper reading for ladies," said the young Englishman, severely, offering his arm to Mrs. Headway.

"Ah, you might have told me before I had bought them!" she exclaimed, in exaggerated dismay.

"I couldn't imagine you would buy a hundred and fifty volumes."

"A hundred and fifty? I have only bought two."

"Perhaps two won't hurt you!" said Littlemore with a smile.

She darted him a reproachful ray. "I know what you mean,—that I'm too bad already! Well, bad as I am, you must come and see me." And she threw him the name of her hotel, as she walked away with her Englishman. Waterville looked after the latter with a certain interest; he had heard of him in London, and had seen his portrait in *Vanity Fair*.

It was not yet time to go down, in spite of this gentleman's saying so, and Littlemore and his friend passed out on the balcony of the Foyer. "Headway—Headway? Where the deuce did she get that name?" Littlemore asked, as they looked down into the animated dusk.

"From her husband, I suppose," Waterville suggested.

"From her husband? From which? The last was named Beck."

"How many has she had?" Waterville inquired, anxious to hear how it was that Mrs. Headway was not respectable.

"I haven't the least idea. But it wouldn't be difficult to find out, as I believe they are all living. She was Mrs. Beck—Nancy Beck—when I knew her."

"Nancy Beck!" cried Waterville, aghast. He was thinking of her delicate profile, like that of a pretty Roman empress. There was a great deal to be explained.

Littlemore explained it in a few words before they returned to their places, admitting indeed that he was not yet able to elucidate her present situation. She was a memory of his Western days; he had seen her last some six years before. He had known her very well, and in several places; the circle of her activity was chiefly the South-West. This activity was of a vague character, except in the sense that it was exclusively

social. She was supposed to have a husband, one Philadelphus Beck, the editor of a Democratic newspaper, the *Dakotah Sentinel*; but Littlemore had never seen him—the pair were living apart—and it was the impression at San Diego that matrimony, for Mr. and Mrs. Beck, was about played out. He remembered now to have heard afterwards that she was getting a divorce. She got divorces very easily, she was so taking in court. She had got one or two before from a man whose name he had forgotten, and there was a legend that even these were not the first. She had been exceedingly divorced ! When he first met her in California she called herself Mrs. Grenville, which he had been given to understand was not an appellation acquired in matrimony, but her parental name, resumed after the dissolution of an unfortunate union. She had had these episodes—her unions were all unfortunate—and had borne half a dozen names. She was a charming woman, especially for New Mexico; but she had been divorced too often—it was a tax on one's credulity; she must have repudiated more husbands than she had married.

At San Diego she was staying with her sister, whose actual spouse (she, too, had been divorced), the principal man of the place, kept a bank (with the aid of a six-shooter), and who had never suffered Nancy to want for a home during her unattached periods. Nancy had begun very young; she must be about thirty-seven to-day. That was all he meant by her not being respectable. The chronology was rather mixed; her sister at least had once told him that there was one winter when she didn't know herself *who* was Nancy's husband. She had gone in mainly for editors—she esteemed the journalistic profession. They must all have been dreadful ruffians, for her own amiability was manifest. It was well known that whatever she had done she had done in self-defence. In fine, she had done things; that was the main point now ! She was very pretty, good-natured,

and clever, and quite the best company in those parts. She was a genuine product of the far West—a flower of the Pacific slope ; ignorant, audacious, crude, but full of pluck and spirit, of natural intelligence, and of a certain intermittent, haphazard good taste. She used to say that she only wanted a chance—apparently she had found it now. At one time, without her, he didn't see how he could have put up with the life. He had started a cattle-ranch, to which San Diego was the nearest town, and he used to ride over to see her. Sometimes he stayed there for a week ; then he went to see her every evening. It was horribly hot ; they used to sit on the back piazza. She was always as attractive, and very nearly as well-dressed, as they had just beheld her. As far as appearance went, she might have been transplanted at an hour's notice from that dusty old settlement to the city by the Seine.

"Some of those Western women are wonderful," Littlemore said. "Like her, they only want a chance."

He had not been in love with her—there never was anything of that sort between them. There might have been, of course ; but as it happened, there was not. Headway apparently was the successor of Beck ; perhaps there had been others between. She was in no sort of "society ;" she only had a local reputation ("the elegant and accomplished Mrs. Beck," the newspapers called her—the other editors, to whom she wasn't married), though, indeed, in that spacious civilisation the locality was large. She knew nothing of the East, and to the best of his belief at that period had never seen New York. Various things might have happened in those six years, however ; no doubt she had "come up." The West was sending us everything (Littlemore spoke as a New Yorker) ; no doubt it would send us at last our brilliant women. This little woman used to look quite over the head of New York ; even in those days she thought and talked of Paris, which there was

no prospect of her knowing ; that was the way she had got on in New Mexico. She had had her ambition, her presentiments ; she had known she was meant for better things. Even at San Diego she had prefigured her little Sir Arthur ; every now and then a wandering Englishman came within her range. They were not all baronets and M.P.'s, but they were usually a change from the editors. What she was doing with her present acquisition he was curious to see. She was certainly—if he had any capacity for that state of mind, which was not too apparent—making him happy. She looked very splendid ; Headway had probably made a “pile,” an achievement not to be imputed to any of the others. She didn't accept money—he was sure she didn't accept money.

On their way back to their seats Littlemore, whose tone had been humorous, but with that strain of the pensive which is inseparable from retrospect, suddenly broke into audible laughter.

“The modelling of a statue and the works of Voltaire !” he exclaimed, recurring to two or three things she had said. “It's comical to hear her attempt those flights, for in New Mexico she knew nothing about modelling.”

“She didn't strike me as affected,” Waterville rejoined, feeling a vague impulse to take a considerate view of her.

“Oh, no ; she's only—as she says—fearfully changed.

They were in their places before the play went on again, and they both gave another glance at Mrs. Headway's box. She leaned back, slowly fanning herself, and evidently watching Littlemore, as if she had been waiting to see him come in. Sir Arthur Demesne sat beside her, rather gloomily, resting a round, pink chin upon a high stiff collar ; neither of them seemed to speak.

“Are you sure she makes him happy ?” Waterville asked.

“Yes—that's the way those people show it.”

“But does she go about alone with him that way ? Where's her husband ?”

"I suppose she has divorced him."

"And does she want to marry the baronet?" Water-ville asked, as if his companion were omniscient.

It amused Littlemore for the moment to appear so.

"He wants to marry her, I guess."

"And be divorced, like the others?"

"Oh no; this time she has got what she wants," said Littlemore, as the curtain rose.

He suffered three days to elapse before he called at the Hôtel Meurice, which she had designated, and we may occupy this interval in adding a few words to the story we have taken from his lips. George Littlemore's residence in the far West had been of the usual tentative sort—he had gone there to replenish a pocket depleted by youthful extravagance. His first attempts had failed; the days were passing away when a fortune was to be picked up even by a young man who might be supposed to have inherited from an honourable father, lately removed, some of those fine abilities, mainly dedicated to the importation of tea, to which the elder Mr. Littlemore was indebted for the power of leaving his son well off. Littlemore had dissipated his patrimony, and he was not quick to discover his talents, which, consisting chiefly of an unlimited faculty for smoking and horse-breaking, appeared to lie in the direction of none of the professions called liberal. He had been sent to Harvard to have his aptitudes cultivated, but here they took such a form that repression had been found more necessary than stimulus—repression embodied in an occasional sojourn in one of the lovely villages of the Connecticut valley. Rustication saved him, perhaps, in the sense that it detached him; it destroyed his ambitions, which had been foolish. At the age of thirty Littlemore had mastered none of the useful arts, unless we include in the number the great art of indifference. He was roused from his indifference by a stroke of good luck. To oblige a friend who was even in more pressing need of cash

than himself, he had purchased for a moderate sum (the proceeds of a successful game of poker) a share in a silver mine, which the disposer, with unusual candour, admitted to be destitute of metal. Littlemore looked into his mine and recognised the truth of the contention, which, however, was demolished some two years later by a sudden revival of curiosity on the part of one of the other shareholders. This gentleman, convinced that a silver mine without silver is as rare as an effect without a cause, discovered the sparkle of the precious element deep down in the reason of things. The discovery was agreeable to Littlemore, and was the beginning of a fortune which, through several dull years and in many rough places, he had repeatedly despaired of, and which a man whose purpose was never very keen did not perhaps altogether deserve. It was before he saw himself successful that he had made the acquaintance of the lady now established at the Hôtel Meurice. To-day he owned the largest share in his mine, which remained perversely productive, and which enabled him to buy, among other things, in Montana, a cattle-ranch of much finer proportions than the dry acres near San Diego. Ranches and mines encourage security, and the consciousness of not having to watch the sources of his income too anxiously (an obligation which for a man of his disposition spoils everything) now added itself to his usual coolness. It was not that this same coolness had not been considerably tried. To take only one—the principal—instance: he had lost his wife after only a twelvemonth of marriage, some three years before the date at which we meet him. He was more than forty when he encountered and wooed a young girl of twenty-three, who, like himself, had consulted all the probabilities in expecting a succession of happy years. She left him a small daughter, now entrusted to the care of his only sister, the wife of an English squire and mistress of a dull park in Hampshire. This lady, Mrs. Dolphin by name, had captivated her

landowner during a journey in which Mr. Dolphin had promised himself to examine the institutions of the United States. The institution on which he reported most favourably was the pretty girls of the larger towns, and he returned to New York a year or two later to marry Miss Littlemore, who, unlike her brother, had not wasted her patrimony. Her sister-in-law, married many years later, and coming to Europe on this occasion, had died in London—where she flattered herself the doctors were infallible—a week after the birth of her little girl; and poor Littlemore, though relinquishing his child for the moment, remained in these disappointing countries to be within call of the Hampshire nursery. He was rather a noticeable man, especially since his hair and moustache had turned white. Tall and strong, with a good figure and a bad carriage, he looked capable but indolent, and was usually supposed to have an importance of which he was far from being conscious. His eye was at once keen and quiet, his smile dim and dilatory, but exceedingly genuine. His principal occupation to-day was doing nothing, and he did it with a sort of artistic perfection. This faculty excited real envy on the part of Rupert Waterville, who was ten years younger than he, and who had too many ambitions and anxieties—none of them very important, but making collectively a considerable incubus—to be able to wait for inspiration. He thought it a great accomplishment, he hoped some day to arrive at it; it made a man so independent; he had his resources within his own breast. Littlemore could sit for a whole evening, without utterance or movement, smoking cigars and looking absently at his finger-nails. As every one knew that he was a good fellow and had made his fortune, this dull behaviour could not well be attributed to stupidity or to moroseness. It seemed to imply a fund of reminiscence, an experience of life which had left him hundreds of things to think about. Waterville felt that if he could make a good use of these present years, and keep a sharp

look-out for experience, he too, at forty-five, might have time to look at his finger-nails. He had an idea that such contemplations—not of course in their literal, but in their symbolic intensity—were a sign of a man of the world. Waterville, reckoning possibly without an ungrateful Department of State, had also an idea that he had embraced the diplomatic career. He was the junior of the two Secretaries who render the *personnel* of the United States Legation in London exceptionally numerous, and was at present enjoying his annual leave of absence. It became a diplomatist to be inscrutable, and though he had by no means, as a whole, taken Littlemore as his model—there were much better ones in the diplomatic body in London—he thought he looked inscrutable when of an evening, in Paris, after he had been asked what he would like to do, he replied that he should like to do nothing, and simply sat for an interminable time in front of the Grand Café, on the Boulevard de la Madeleine (he was very fond of cafés), ordering a succession of *demitasses*. It was very rarely that Littlemore cared even to go to the theatre, and the visit to the Comédie Française, which we have described, had been undertaken at Waterville's instance. He had seen *Le Demi-Monde* a few nights before, and had been told that *L'Aventurière* would show him a particular treatment of the same subject—the justice to be meted out to unscrupulous women who attempt to thrust themselves into honourable families. It seemed to him that in both of these cases the ladies had deserved their fate, but he wished it might have been brought about by a little less lying on the part of the representatives of honour. Littlemore and he, without being intimate, were very good friends, and spent much of their time together. As it turned out, Littlemore was very glad he had gone to the theatre, for he found himself much interested in this new incarnation of Nancy Beck.

II.

HIS delay in going to see her was nevertheless calculated ; there were more reasons for it than it is necessary to mention. But when he went, Mrs. Headway was at home, and Littlemore was not surprised to see Sir Arthur Demesne in her sitting-room. There was something in the air which seemed to indicate that this gentleman's visit had already lasted a certain time. Littlemore thought it probable that, given the circumstances, he would now bring it to a close ; he must have learned from their hostess that Littlemore was an old and familiar friend. He might of course have definite rights—he had every appearance of it ; but the more definite they were the more gracefully he could afford to waive them. Littlemore made these reflections while Sir Arthur Demesne sat there looking at him without giving any sign of departure. Mrs. Headway was very gracious—she had the manner of having known you a hundred years ; she scolded Littlemore extravagantly for not having been to see her sooner, but this was only a form of the gracious. By daylight she looked a little faded ; but she had an expression which could never fade. She had the best rooms in the hotel, and an air of extreme opulence and prosperity ; her courier sat outside, in the ante-chamber, and she evidently knew how to live. She attempted to include Sir Arthur in the conversation, but though the young man remained in his place, he declined to be included. He smiled, in silence ; but he was evidently uncomfortable. The conversation, therefore, remained superficial—a quality that, of old, had by no means belonged to Mrs. Headway's interviews with her friends. The Englishman looked at Littlemore with a strange, perverse expression, which Littlemore, at first, with a good deal of private amusement, simply attributed to jealousy.

"My dear Sir Arthur, I wish very much you would go," Mrs. Headway remarked, at the end of a quarter of an hour.

Sir Arthur got up and took his hat. "I thought I should oblige you by staying."

"To defend me against Mr. Littlemore? I've known him since I was a baby—I know the worst he can do." She fixed her charming smile for a moment on her retreating visitor, and she added, with much unexpectedness, "I want to talk to him about my past!"

"That's just what I want to hear," said Sir Arthur, with his hand on the door.

"We are going to talk American; you wouldn't understand us!—He speaks in the English style," she explained, in her little sufficient way, as the baronet, who announced that at all events he would come back in the evening, let himself out.

"He doesn't know about your past?" Littlemore inquired, trying not to make the question sound impertinent.

"Oh, yes; I've told him everything; but he doesn't understand. The English are so peculiar; I think they are rather stupid. He has never heard of a woman being——" But here Mrs. Headway checked herself, while Littlemore filled out the blank. "What are you laughing at? It doesn't matter," she went on; "there are more things in the world than those people have heard of. However, I like them very much; at least I like him. He's such a gentleman; do you know what I mean? Only, he stays too long, and he isn't amusing, I'm very glad to see you, for a change."

"Do you mean I'm not a gentleman?" Littlemore asked.

"No, indeed; you used to be, in New Mexico. I think you were the only one—and I hope you are still. That's why I recognised you the other night; I might have cut you, you know."

"You can still, if you like. It's not too late."

"Oh, no; that's not what I want. I want you to help me."

"To help you?"

Mrs. Headway fixed her eyes for a moment on the door. "Do you suppose that man is there still?"

"That young man—your poor Englishman?"

"No; I mean Max. Max is my courier," said Mrs. Headway, with a certain impressiveness.

"I haven't the least idea. I'll see, if you like."

"No; in that case I should have to give him an order, and I don't know what in the world to ask him to do. He sits there for hours; with my simple habits I afford him no employment. I am afraid I have no imagination."

"The burden of grandeur," said Littlemore.

"Oh yes, I'm very grand. But, on the whole, I like it. I'm only afraid he'll hear. I talk so very loud; that's another thing I am trying to get over."

"Why do you want to be different?"

"Well, because everything else is different," Mrs. Headway rejoined, with a little sigh. "Did you hear that I'd lost my husband?" she went on abruptly.

"Do you mean—a — Mr. —?" and Littlemore paused, with an effect that did not seem to come home to her.

"I mean Mr. Headway," she said, with dignity. "I've been through a good deal since you saw me last: marriage, and death, and trouble, and all sorts of things."

"You had been through a good deal of marriage before that," Littlemore ventured to observe.

She rested her eyes on him with soft brightness, and without a change of colour. "Not so much—not so much——"

"Not so much as might have been thought."

"Not so much as was reported. I forget whether I was married when I saw you last."

"It was one of the reports," said Littlemore. "But I never saw Mr. Beck."

"You didn't lose much ; he was a simple *wretch* ! I have done certain things in my life which I have never understood ; no wonder others can't understand them. But that's all over ! Are you sure Max doesn't hear ?" she asked, quickly.

"Not at all sure. But if you suspect him of listening at the keyhole, I would send him away."

"I don't think he does that. I am always rushing to the door."

"Then he doesn't hear. I had no idea you had so many secrets. When I parted with you, Mr. Headway was in the future."

"Well, now he's in the past. He was a pleasant man—I can understand my doing that. But he only lived a year. He had neuralgia of the heart ; he left me very well off." She mentioned these various facts as if they were quite of the same order.

"I'm glad to hear it ; you used to have expensive tastes."

"I have plenty of money," said Mrs. Headway. "Mr. Headway had property at Denver, which has increased immensely in value. After his death I tried New York. But I don't like New York." Littlemore's hostess uttered this last sentence in a tone which was the *résumé* of a social episode. I mean to live in Europe—I like Europe," she announced ; and the manner of the announcement had a touch of prophecy, as the other words had had a reverberation of history.

Littlemore was very much struck with all this, and he was greatly entertained with Mrs. Headway. "Are you travelling with that young man ?" he inquired, with the coolness of a person who wishes to make his entertainment go as far as possible.

She folded her arms as she leaned back in her chair. "Look here, Mr. Littlemore," she said ; "I'm about as

good-natured as I used to be in America, but I know a great deal more. Of course I ain't travelling with that young man ; he's only a friend."

"He isn't a lover?" asked Littlemore, rather cruelly.

"Do people travel with their lovers? I don't want you to laugh at me—I want you to help me." She fixed her eyes on him with an air of tender remonstrance that might have touched him ; she looked so gentle and reasonable. "As I tell you, I have taken a great fancy to this old Europe ; I feel as if I should never go back. But I want to see something of the life. I think it would suit me—if I could get started a little. Mr. Littlemore," she added, in a moment—"I may as well be frank, for I ain't at all ashamed. I want to get into society. That's what I'm after !"

Littlemore settled himself in his chair, with the feeling of a man who, knowing that he will have to pull, seeks to obtain a certain leverage. It was in a tone of light jocosity, almost of encouragement, however, that he repeated : "Into society? It seems to me you are in it already, with baronets for your adorers."

"That's just what I want to know !" she said, with a certain eagerness. "Is a baronet much?"

"So they are apt to think. But I know very little about it."

"Ain't you in society yourself?"

"I? Never in the world ! Where did you get that idea? I care no more about society than about that copy of the *Figaro*."

Mrs. Headway's countenance assumed for a moment a look of extreme disappointment, and Littlemore could see that, having heard of his silver mine and his cattle ranch, and knowing that he was living in Europe, she had hoped to find him immersed in the world of fashion. But she speedily recovered herself. "I don't believe a word of it. You know you're a gentlemen—you can't help yourself."

"I may be a gentleman, but I have none of the habits of one." Littlemore hesitated a moment, and then he added—"I lived too long in the great South-West."

She flushed quickly; she instantly understood—understood even more than he had meant to say. But she wished to make use of him, and it was of more importance that she should appear forgiving—especially as she had the happy consciousness of being so, than that she should punish a cruel speech. She could afford, however, to be lightly ironical. "That makes no difference—a gentleman is always a gentleman."

"Not always," said Littlemore, laughing.

"It's impossible that, through your sister, you shouldn't know something about European society," said Mrs. Headway.

At the mention of his sister, made with a studied lightness of reference which he caught as it passed, Littlemore was unable to repress a start. "What in the world have you got to do with my sister?" he would have liked to say. The introduction of this lady was disagreeable to him; she belonged to quite another order of ideas, and it was out of the question that Mrs. Headway should ever make her acquaintance—if this was what, as that lady would have said—she was "after." But he took advantage of a side issue. "What do you mean by European society? One can't talk about that. It's a very vague phrase."

"Well, I mean English society—I mean the society your sister lives in—that's what I mean," said Mrs. Headway, who was quite prepared to be definite. "I mean the people I saw in London last May—the people I saw at the opera and in the park, the people who go to the Queen's drawing-rooms. When I was in London I stayed at that hotel on the corner of Piccadilly—that looking straight down St. James's Street—and I spent hours together at the window looking at the people in the carriages. I had a carriage of my own, and when I

was not at my window I was driving all round. I was all alone ; I saw every one, but I knew no one—I had no one to tell me. I didn't know Sir Arthur then—I only met him a month ago at Homburg. He followed me to Paris—that's how he came to be my guest." Serenely, prosaically, without any of the inflation of vanity, Mrs. Headway made this last assertion ; it was as if she were used to being followed, or as if a gentleman one met at Homburg would inevitably follow. In the same tone she went on : "I attracted a good deal of attention in London—I could easily see that."

"You'll do that wherever you go," Littlemore said, insufficiently enough, as he felt.

"I don't want to attract so much ; I think it's vulgar," Mrs. Headway rejoined, with a certain soft sweetness which seemed to denote the enjoyment of a new idea. She was evidently open to new ideas.

"Every one was looking at you the other night at the theatre," Littlemore continued. "How can you hope to escape notice?"

"I don't want to escape notice—people have always looked at me, and I suppose they always will. But there are different ways of being looked at, and I know the way I want. I mean to have it, too!" Mrs. Headway exclaimed. Yes, she was very definite.

Littlemore sat there, face to face with her, and for some time he said nothing. He had a mixture of feelings, and the memory of other places, other hours, was stealing over him. There had been of old a very considerable absence of interposing surfaces between these two—he had known her as one knew people only in the great South-West. He had liked her extremely, in a town where it would have been ridiculous to be difficult to please. But his sense of this fact was somehow connected with South-Western conditions ; his liking for Nancy Beck was an emotion of which the proper setting was a back piazza. She presented herself here on a new basis

--she appeared to desire to be classified afresh. Littlemore said to himself that this was too much trouble ; he had taken her in that way—he couldn't begin at this time of day to take her in another way. He asked himself whether she were going to be a bore. It was not easy to suppose Mrs. Headway capable of this offence ; but she might become tiresome if she were bent upon being different. It made him rather afraid when she began to talk about European society, about his sister, about things being vulgar. Littlemore was a very good fellow, and he had at least the average human love of justice ; but there was in his composition an element of the indolent, the sceptical, perhaps even the brutal, which made him desire to preserve the simplicity of their former terms of intercourse. He had no particular desire to see a woman rise again, as the mystic process was called ; he didn't believe in women's rising again. He believed in their not going down ; thought it perfectly possible and eminently desirable, but held it was much better for society that they should not endeavour, as the French say, to *mêler les genres*. In general, he didn't pretend to say what was good for society—society seemed to him in rather a bad way ; but he had a conviction on this particular point. Nancy Beck going in for the great prizes, that spectacle might be entertaining for a simple spectator ; but it would be a nuisance, an embarrassment, from the moment anything more than contemplation should be expected of him. He had no wish to be rough, but it might be well to show her that he was not to be humbugged.

"Oh, if there's anything you want you'll have it," he said, in answer to her last remark. "You have always had what you want."

"Well, I want something new this time. Does your sister reside in London?"

"My dear lady, what do you know about my sister?" Littlemore asked. "She's not a woman you would care for."

Mrs. Headway was silent a moment. "You don't respect me!" she exclaimed suddenly, in a loud, almost gay tone of voice. If Littlemore wished, as I say, to preserve the simplicity of their old terms of intercourse, she was apparently willing to humour him.

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Beck . . . !" he cried, vaguely, protestingly, and using her former name quite by accident. At San Diego, he had never thought whether he respected her or not; that never came up.

"That's a proof of it—calling me by that hateful name! Don't you believe I'm married? I haven't been fortunate in my names," she added, pensively.

"You make it very awkward when you say such mad things. My sister lives most of the year in the country; she is very simple, rather dull, perhaps a trifle narrow-minded. You are very clever, very lively, and as wide as all creation. That's why I think you wouldn't like her."

"You ought to be ashamed to run down your sister!" cried Mrs. Headway. "You told me once—at San Diego—that she was the nicest woman you knew. I made a note of that, you see. And you told me she was just my age. So that makes it rather uncomfortable for you, if you won't introduce me!" And Littlemore's hostess gave a pitiless laugh. "I'm not in the least afraid of her being dull. It's very distinguished to be dull. I'm ever so much too lively."

"You are indeed, ever so much! But nothing is more easy than to know my sister," said Littlemore, who knew perfectly that what he said was untrue. And then, as a diversion from this delicate topic, he suddenly asked, "Are you going to marry Sir Arthur?"

"Don't you think I've been married about enough?"

"Possibly; but this is a new line, it would be different. An Englishman—that's a new sensation."

"If I should marry, it would be a European," said Mrs. Headway calmly.

"Your chance is very good ; they are all marrying Americans."

"He would have to be some one fine, the man I should marry now. I have a good deal to make up for ! That's what I want to know about Sir Arthur ; all this time you haven't told me "

"I have nothing in the world to tell—I have never heard of him. Hasn't he told you himself?"

"Nothing at all ; he is very modest. He doesn't brag, nor make himself out anything great. That's what I like him for : I think it's in such good taste. I like good taste !" exclaimed Mrs. Headway. "But all this time," she added, "you haven't told me you would help me."

"How can I help you ? I'm no one, I have no power."

"You can help me by not preventing me. I want you to promise not to prevent me." She gave him her fixed, bright gaze again ; her eyes seemed to look far into his.

"Good Lord, how could I prevent you ?"

"I'm not sure that you could. But you might try."

"I'm too indolent, and too stupid," said Littlemore jocosely.

"Yes," she replied, musing as she still looked at him.

"I think you are too stupid. But I think you are also too kind," she added more graciously. She was almost irresistible when she said such a thing as that.

They talked for a quarter of an hour longer, and at last—as if she had had scruples—she spoke to him of his own marriage, of the death of his wife, matters to which she alluded more felicitously (as he thought) than to some other points. "If you have a little girl you ought to be very happy ; that's what I should like to have. Lord, I should make her a nice woman ! Not like me—in another style !" When he rose to leave her, she told him that he must come and see her very often ;

she was to be some weeks longer in Paris ; he must bring Mr. Waterville.

"Your English friend won't like that—our coming very often," Littlemore said, as he stood with his hand on the door.

"I don't know what he has got to do with it," she answered, staring.

"Neither do I. Only he must be in love with you."

"That doesn't give him any right. Mercy, if I had had to put myself out for all the men that have been in love with me !"

"Of course you would have had a terrible life ! Even doing as you please, you have had rather an agitated one. But your young Englishman's sentiments appear to give him the right to sit there, after one comes in, looking blighted and bored. That might become very tiresome."

"The moment he becomes tiresome I send him away. You can trust me for that."

"Oh," said Littlemore, "it doesn't matter, after all." He remembered that it would be very inconvenient to him to have undisturbed possession of Mrs. Headway.

She came out with him into the antechamber. Mr. Max, the courier, was fortunately not there. She lingered a little ; she appeared to have more to say.

"On the contrary, he likes you to come," she remarked in a moment ; "he wants to study my friends."

"To study them ?"

"He wants to find out about me, and he thinks they may tell him something. Some day he will ask you right out, 'What sort of a woman is she, any way ?'"

"Hasn't he found out yet ?"

"He doesn't understand me," said Mrs. Headway, surveying the front of her dress. "He has never seen any one like me."

"I should imagine not !"

"So he will ask you, as I say."

"I will tell him you are the most charming woman in Europe."

"That ain't a description! Besides, he knows it. He wants to know if I'm respectable."

"He's very curious!" Littlemore cried, with a laugh.

She grew a little pale; she seemed to be watching his lips. "Mind you tell him," she went on with a smile that brought none of her colour back.

"Respectable? I'll tell him you're adorable!"

Mrs. Headway stood a moment longer. "Ah, you're no use!" she murmured. And she suddenly turned away and passed back into her sitting-room, slowly drawing her far-trailing skirts.

III.

"*Elle ne doute de rien!*" Littlemore said to himself as he walked away from the hotel; and he repeated the phrase in talking about her to Waterville. "She wants to be right," he added; "but she will never really succeed; she has begun too late, she will never be more than half right. However, she won't know when she's wrong, so it doesn't signify!" And then he proceeded to assert that in some respects she would remain incurable; she had no delicacy; no discretion, no shading; she was a woman who suddenly said to you, "You don't respect me!" As if that were a thing for a woman to say!

"It depends upon what she meant by it." Waterville liked to see the meanings of things.

"The more she meant by it the less she ought to say it!" Littlemore declared.

But he returned to the Hôtel Meurice, and on the next occasion he took Waterville with him. The

Secretary of Legation, who had not often been in close quarters with a lady of this ambiguous quality, was prepared to regard Mrs. Headway as a very curious type. He was afraid she might be dangerous ; but, on the whole, he felt secure. The object of his devotion at present was his country, or at least the Department of State ; he had no intention of being diverted from that allegiance. Besides, he had his ideal of the attractive woman—a person pitched in a very much lower key than this shining, smiling, rustling, chattering daughter of the Territories. The woman he should care for would have repose, a certain love of privacy—she would sometimes let one alone. Mrs. Headway was personal, familiar, intimate ; she was always appealing or accusing, demanding explanations and pledges, saying things one had to answer. All this was accompanied with a hundred smiles and radiations and other natural graces, but the general effect of it was slightly fatiguing. She had certainly a great deal of charm, an immense desire to please, and a wonderful collection of dresses and trinkets ; but she was eager and preoccupied, and it was impossible that other people should share her eagerness. If she wished to get into society, there was no reason why her bachelor visitors should wish to see her there ; for it was the absence of the usual social incumbrances which made her drawing-room attractive. There was no doubt whatever that she was several women in one, and she ought to content herself with that sort of numerical triumph. Littlemore said to Waterville that it was stupid of her to wish to scale the heights ; she ought to know how much more she was in her place down below. She appeared vaguely to irritate him ; even her fluttering attempts at self-culture—she had become a great critic, and handled many of the productions of the age with a bold, free touch—constituted a vague invocation, an appeal for sympathy which was naturally annoying to a man who disliked the trouble of

revising old decisions, consecrated by a certain amount of reminiscence that might be called tender. She had, however, one palpable charm ; she was full of surprises. Even Waterville was obliged to confess that an element of the unexpected was not to be excluded from his conception of the woman who should have an ideal repose. Of course there were two kinds of surprises, and only one of them was thoroughly pleasant, though Mrs. Headway dealt impartially in both. She had the sudden delights, the odd exclamations, the queer curiosities of a person who has grown up in a country where everything is new and many things ugly, and who, with a natural turn for the arts and amenities of life, makes a tardy acquaintance with some of the finer usages, the higher pleasures. She was provincial—it was easy to see that she was provincial ; that took no great cleverness. But what was Parisian enough—if to be Parisian was the measure of success—was the way she picked up ideas and took a hint from every circumstance. “Only give me time, and I shall know all I have need of,” she said to Littlemore, who watched her progress with a mixture of admiration and sadness. She delighted to speak of herself as a poor little barbarian who was trying to pick up a few crumbs of knowledge, and this habit took great effect from her delicate face, her perfect dress, and the brilliancy of her manners.

One of her surprises was, that after that first visit she said no more to Littlemore about Mrs. Dolphin. He did her perhaps the grossest injustice ; but he had quite expected her to bring up this lady whenever they met. “If she will only leave Agnes alone, she may do what she will,” he said to Waterville, expressing his relief. “My sister would never look at her, and it would be very awkward to have to tell her so.” She expected assistance ; she made him feel that simply by the way she looked at him ; but for the moment she demanded no definite service. She held her tongue, but she waited,

and her patience itself was a kind of admonition. In the way of society, it must be confessed, her privileges were meagre, Sir Arthur Demesne and her two compatriots being, so far as the latter could discover, her only visitors. She might have had other friends, but she held her head very high, and liked better to see no one than not to see the best company. It was evident that she flattered herself that she produced the effect of being, not neglected, but fastidious. There were plenty of Americans in Paris, but in this direction she failed to extend her acquaintance; the nice people wouldn't come and see her, and nothing would have induced her to receive the others. She had the most exact conception of the people she wished to see and to avoid. Littlemore expected every day that she would ask him why he didn't bring some of his friends, and he had his answer ready. It was a very poor one, for it consisted simply of a conventional assurance that he wished to keep her for himself. She would be sure to retort that this was very "thin," as, indeed, it was; but the days went by without her calling him to account. The little American colony in Paris is rich in amiable women, but there were none to whom Littlemore could make up his mind to say that it would be a favour to him to call on Mrs. Headway. He shouldn't like them the better for doing so, and he wished to like those of whom he might ask a favour. Except, therefore, that he occasionally spoke of her as a little Western woman, very pretty and rather queer, who had formerly been a great chum of his, she remained unknown in the *salons* of the Avenue Gabriel and the streets that encircle the Arch of Triumph. To ask the men to go and see her, without asking the ladies, would only accentuate the fact that he didn't ask the ladies; so he asked no one at all. Besides, it was true—just a little—that he wished to keep her to himself, and he was fatuous enough to believe that she cared much more for him than for her Englishman. Of course,

however, he would never dream of marrying her, whereas the Englishman apparently was immersed in that vision. She hated her past ; she used to announce that very often, talking of it as if it were an appendage of the same order as a dishonest courier, or even an inconvenient protrusion of drapery. Therefore, as Littlemore was part of her past, it might have been supposed that she would hate him too, and wish to banish him, with all the images he recalled, from her sight. But she made an exception in his favour, and if she disliked their old relations as a chapter of her own history, she seemed still to like them as a chapter of his. He felt that she clung to him, that she believed he could help her and in the long run would. It was to the long run that she appeared little by little to have attuned herself.

She succeeded perfectly in maintaining harmony between Sir Arthur Demesne and her American visitors, who spent much less time in her drawing-room. She had easily persuaded him that there were no grounds for jealousy, and that they had no wish, as she said, to crowd him out ; for it was ridiculous to be jealous of two persons at once, and Rupert Waterville, after he had learned the way to her hospitable apartment, appeared there as often as his friend Littlemore. The two, indeed, usually came together, and they ended by relieving their competitor of a certain sense of responsibility. This amiable and excellent but somewhat limited and slightly pretentious young man, who had not yet made up his mind, was sometimes rather oppressed with the magnitude of his undertaking, and when he was alone with Mrs. Headway the tension of his thoughts occasionally became quite painful. He was very slim and straight, and looked taller than his height ; he had the prettiest, silkiest hair, which waved away from a large white forehead, and he was endowed with a nose of the so-called Roman model. He looked younger than his years (in spite of those last two attributes), partly on account of

the delicacy of his complexion and the almost childlike candour of his round blue eye. He was diffident and self-conscious ; there were certain letters he could not pronounce. At the same time he had the manners of a young man who had been brought up to fill a considerable place in the world, with whom a certain correctness had become a habit, and who, though he might occasionally be a little awkward about small things, would be sure to acquit himself honourably in great ones. He was very simple, and he believed himself very serious ; he had the blood of a score of Warwickshire squires in his veins ; mingled in the last instance with the somewhat paler fluid which animated the long-necked daughter of a banker who had expected an earl for his son-in-law, but who had consented to regard Sir Baldwin Demesne as the least insufficient of baronets. The boy, the only one, had come into his title at five years of age ; his mother, who disappointed her auriferous sire a second time when poor Sir Baldwin broke his neck in the hunting field, watched over him with a tenderness that burned as steadily as a candle shaded by a transparent hand. She never admitted, even to herself, that he was not the cleverest of men ; but it took all her own cleverness, which was much greater than his, to maintain this appearance. Fortunately he was not wild, so that he would never marry an actress or a governess, like two or three of the young men who had been at Eton with him. With this ground of nervousness the less, Lady Demesne awaited with an air of confidence his promotion to some high office. He represented in Parliament the Conservative instincts and vote of a red-roofed market town, and sent regularly to his bookseller for all the new publications on economical subjects, for he was determined that his political attitude should have a firm statistical basis. He was not conceited ; he was only misinformed—misinformed, I mean, about himself. He thought himself indispensable in the scheme of things—not as an indi-

vidual, but as an institution. This conviction, however, was too sacred to betray itself by vulgar assumptions. If he was a little man in a big place, he never strutted nor talked loud ; he merely felt it as a kind of luxury that he had a large social circumference. It was like sleeping in a big bed ; one didn't toss about the more, but one felt a greater freshness.

He had never seen anything like Mrs. Headway ; he hardly knew by what standard to measure her. She was not like an English lady—not like those at least with whom he had been accustomed to converse ; and yet it was impossible not to see that she had a standard of her own. He suspected that she was provincial, but as he was very much under the charm he compromised matters by saying to himself that she was only foreign. It was of course provincial to be foreign ; but this was, after all, a peculiarity which she shared with a great many nice people. He was not wild, and his mother had flattered herself that in this all-important matter he would not be perverse ; but it was all the same most unexpected that he should have taken a fancy to an American widow, five years older than himself, who knew no one, and who sometimes didn't appear to understand exactly who he was. Though he disapproved of it, it was precisely her foreignness that pleased him ; she seemed to be as little as possible of his own race and creed ; there was not a touch of Warwickshire in her composition. She was like an Hungarian or a Pole, with the difference that he could almost understand her language. The unfortunate young man was fascinated, though he had not yet admitted to himself that he was in love. He would be very slow and deliberate in such a position, for he was deeply conscious of its importance. He was a young man who had arranged his life ; he had determined to marry at thirty-two. A long line of ancestors was watching him ; he hardly knew what they would think of Mrs. Headway. He hardly knew what he thought himself ;

the only thing he was absolutely sure of was that she made the time pass as it passed in no other pursuit. He was vaguely uneasy ; he was by no means sure it was right the time should pass like that. There was nothing to show for it but the fragments of Mrs. Headway's conversation, the peculiarities of her accent, the sallies of her wit, the audacities of her fancy, her mysterious allusions to her past. Of course he knew that she had a past ; she was not a young girl, she was a widow—and widows are essentially an expression of an accomplished fact. He was not jealous of her antecedents, but he wished to understand them, and it was here that the difficulty occurred. The subject was illumined with fitful flashes, but it never placed itself before him as a general picture. He asked her a good many questions, but her answers were so startling that, like sudden luminous points, they seemed to intensify the darkness round their edges. She had apparently spent her life in an inferior province of an inferior country ; but it didn't follow from this that she herself had been low. She had been a lily among thistles ; and there was something romantic in a man in his position taking an interest in such a woman. It pleased Sir Arthur to believe he was romantic ; that had been the case with several of his ancestors, who supplied a precedent without which he would perhaps not have ventured to trust himself. He was the victim of perplexities from which a single spark of direct perception would have saved him. He took everything in the literal sense ; he had not a grain of humour. He sat there vaguely waiting for something to happen, and not committing himself by rash declarations. If he was in love, it was in his own way, reflectively, inexpressively, obstinately. He was waiting for the formula which would justify his conduct and Mrs. Headway's peculiarities. He hardly knew where it would come from ; you might have thought from his manner that he would discover it in one of the elaborate *entrées* that

were served to the pair when Mrs. Headway consented to dine with him at Bignon's or the Café Anglais ; or in one of the numerous band-boxes that arrived from the Rue de la Paix, and from which she often lifted the lid in the presence of her admirer. There were moments when he got weary of waiting in vain, and at these moments the arrival of her American friends (he often wondered that she had so few) seemed to lift the mystery from his shoulders and give him a chance to rest. This formula—she herself was not yet able to give it, for she was not aware how much ground it was expected to cover. She talked about her past, because she thought it the best thing to do ; she had a shrewd conviction that it was better to make a good use of it than to attempt to efface it. To efface it was impossible, though that was what she would have preferred. She had no objection to telling fibs, but now that she was taking a new departure, she wished to tell only those that were necessary. She would have been delighted if it had been possible to tell none at all. A few, however, were indispensable, and we need not attempt to estimate more closely the ingenious re-arrangements of fact with which she entertained and mystified Sir Arthur. She knew, of course, that as a product of fashionable circles she was nowhere, but she might have great success as a child of nature.

IV.

RUPERT WATERVILLE, in the midst of intercourse in which every one perhaps had a good many mental reservations, never forgot that he was in a representative position, that he was responsible, official ; and he asked himself more than once how far it was permitted to him to countenance Mrs. Headway's pretensions to being an

American lady typical even of the newer phases. In his own way he was as puzzled as poor Sir Arthur, and indeed he flattered himself that he was as particular as any Englishman could be. Suppose that, after all this free association, Mrs. Headway should come over to London, and ask at the Legation to be presented to the Queen? It would be so awkward to refuse her—of course they would have to refuse her—that he was very careful about making tacit promises. She might construe anything as a tacit promise—he knew how the smallest gestures of diplomatists were studied and interpreted. It was his effort, therefore, to be really the diplomatist in his relations with this attractive but dangerous woman. The party of four used often to dine together—Sir Arthur pushed his confidence so far—and on these occasions Mrs. Headway, availing herself of one of the privileges of a lady, even at the most expensive restaurant—used to wipe her glasses with her napkin. One evening, when after polishing a goblet she held it up to the light, giving it, with her head on one side, the least glimmer of a wink, he said to himself as he watched her that she looked like a modern bacchante. He noticed at this moment that the baronet was gazing at her too, and he wondered if the same idea had come to him. He often wondered what the baronet thought; he had devoted first and last a good deal of speculation to the baronial class. Littlemore, alone, at this moment, was not observing Mrs. Headway; he never appeared to observe her, though she often observed him. Waterville asked himself among other things why Sir Arthur had not brought his own friends to see her, for Paris during the several weeks that now elapsed was rich in English visitors. He wondered whether she had asked him and he had refused; he would have liked very much to know whether she had asked him. He explained his curiosity to Littlemore, who, however, took very little interest in it. Littlemore said, nevertheless, that he had

no doubt she had asked him ; she never would be deterred by false delicacy.

"She has been very delicate with you," Waterville replied. "She hasn't been at all pressing of late."

"It is only because she has given me up ; she thinks I'm a brute."

"I wonder what she thinks of me," Waterville said, pensively.

"Oh, she counts upon you to introduce her to the Minister. It's lucky for you that our representative here is absent."

"Well," Waterville rejoined, "the Minister has settled two or three difficult questions, and I suppose he can settle this one. I shall do nothing but by the orders of my chief." He was very fond of talking about his chief.

"She does me injustice," Littlemore added in a moment. "I have spoken to several people about her."

"Ah ; but what have you told them?"

"That she lives at the Hôtel Meurice ; and that she wants to know nice people."

"They are flattered, I suppose, at your thinking them nice, but they don't go," said Waterville.

"I spoke of her to Mrs. Bagshaw, and Mrs. Bagshaw has promised to go."

"Ah," Waterville murmured ; "you don't call Mrs. Bagshaw nice ! Mrs. Headway won't see her."

"That's exactly what she wants,—to be able to cut some one !"

Waterville had a theory that Sir Arthur was keeping Mrs. Headway as a surprise—he meant perhaps to produce her during the next London season. He presently, however, learned as much about the matter as he could have desired to know. He had once offered to accompany his beautiful compatriot to the Museum of the Luxembourg and tell her a little about the modern French school. She had not examined this collection, in spite of her determination to see everything remarkable (she

carried her *Murray* in her lap even when she went to see the great tailor in the Rue de la Paix, to whom, as she said, she had given no end of points); for she usually went to such places with Sir Arthur, and Sir Arthur was indifferent to the modern painters of France. "He says there are much better men in England. I must wait for the Royal Academy, next year. He seems to think one can wait for anything, but I'm not so good at waiting as he. I can't afford to wait—I've waited long enough." So much as this Mrs. Headway said, on the occasion of her arranging with Rupert Waterville that they should some day visit the Luxembourg together. She alluded to the Englishman as if he were her husband or her brother, her natural protector and companion.

"I wonder if she knows how that sounds?" Waterville said to himself. "I don't believe she would do it if she knew how it sounds." And he made the further reflection that when one arrived from San Diego there was no end to the things one had to learn: it took so many things to make a well-bred woman. Clever as she was, Mrs. Headway was right in saying that she couldn't afford to wait. She must learn quickly. She wrote to Waterville one day to propose that they should go to the Museum on the morrow; Sir Arthur's mother was in Paris, on her way to Cannes, where she was to spend the winter. She was only passing through, but she would be there three days, and he would naturally give himself up to her. She appeared to have the properest ideas as to what a gentleman would propose to do for his mother. She herself, therefore, would be free, and she named the hour at which she should expect him to call for her. He was punctual to the appointment, and they drove across the river in the large high-hung barouche in which she constantly rolled about Paris. With Mr. Max on the box—the courier was ornamented with enormous whiskers—this vehicle had an appearance of great respectability, though Sir Arthur assured her—

she repeated this to her other friends—that in London, next year, they would do the thing much better for her. It struck her other friends, of course, that the baronet was prepared to be very consistent, and this, on the whole, was what Waterville would have expected of him. Littlemore simply remarked that at San Diego she drove herself about in a rickety buggy, with muddy wheels, and with a mule very often in the shafts. Waterville felt something like excitement as he asked himself whether the baronet's mother would now consent to know her. She must of course be aware that it was a woman who was keeping her son in Paris at a season when English gentlemen were most naturally employed in shooting partridges.

“She is staying at the Hôtel du Rhin, and I have made him feel that he mustn't leave her while she is here,” Mrs. Headway said, as they drove up the narrow Rue de Seine. “Her name is Lady Demesne, but her full title is the Honourable Lady Demesne, as she's a Baron's daughter. Her father used to be a banker, but he did something or other for the Government—the Tories, you know, they call them—and so he was raised to the peerage. So you see one *can* be raised! She has a lady with her as a companion.” Waterville's neighbour gave him this information with a seriousness that made him smile; he wondered whether she thought he didn't know how a Baron's daughter was addressed. In that she was very provincial; she had a way of exaggerating the value of her intellectual acquisitions, and of assuming that others had been as ignorant as she. He noted, too, that she had ended by suppressing poor Sir Arthur's name altogether, and designating him only by a sort of conjugal pronoun. She had been so much, and so easily, married, that she was full of these misleading references to gentlemen.

V.

THEY walked through the gallery of the Luxembourg, and except that Mrs. Headway looked at everything at once, and at nothing long enough, talked, as usual, rather too loud, and bestowed too much attention on the bad copies that were being made of several indifferent pictures, she was a very agreeable companion and a grateful recipient of knowledge. She was very quick to understand, and Waterville was sure that before she left the gallery she knew something about the French school. She was quite prepared to compare it critically with London exhibitions of the following year. As Littlemore and he had remarked more than once, she was a very odd mixture. Her conversation, her personality, were full of little joints and seams, all of them very visible, where the old and the new had been pieced together. When they had passed through the different rooms of the palace Mrs. Headway proposed that instead of returning directly they should take a stroll in the adjoining gardens, which she wished very much to see, and was sure she should like. She had quite seized the difference between the old Paris and the new, and felt the force of the romantic associations of the Latin quarter as perfectly as if she had enjoyed all the benefits of modern culture. The autumn sun was warm in the alleys and terraces of the Luxembourg; the masses of foliage above them, clipped and squared, rusty with ruddy patches, shed a thick lace-work over the white sky, which was streaked with the palest blue. The beds of flowers near the palace were of the vividest yellow and red, and the sunlight rested on the smooth gray walls of those parts of its basement that looked south; in front of which, on the long green benches, a row of brown-cheeked nurses, in white caps and white aprons, sat offering nutrition to as many

bundles of white drapery. There were other white caps wandering in the broad paths, attended by little brown French children; the small, straw-seated chairs, were piled and stacked in some places and disseminated in others. An old lady in black, with white hair fastened over each of her temples by a large black comb, sat on the edge of a stone bench (too high for her delicate length), motionless, staring straight before her and holding a large door-key; under a tree a priest was reading—you could see his lips move at a distance; a young soldier, dwarfish and red-legged, strolled past with his hands in his pockets, which were very much distended. Waterville sat down with Mrs. Headway on the straw-bottomed chairs, and she presently said, "I like this; it's even better than the pictures in the gallery. It's more of a picture."

"Everything in France is a picture—even things that are ugly," Waterville replied. "Everything makes a subject."

"Well, I like France!" Mrs. Headway went on, with a little incongruous sigh. Then, suddenly, from an impulse even more inconsequent than her sigh, she added, "He asked me to go and see her, but I told him I wouldn't. She may come and see me if she likes." This was so abrupt that Waterville was slightly confounded; but he speedily perceived that she had returned by a short cut to Sir Arthur Demesne and his honourable mother. Waterville liked to know about other people's affairs, but he did not like this taste to be imputed to him; and therefore, though he was curious to see how the old lady, as he called her, would treat his companion, he was rather displeased with the latter for being so confidential. He had never imagined he was so intimate with her as that. Mrs. Headway, however, had a manner of taking intimacy for granted; a manner which Sir Arthur's mother at least would be sure not to like. He pretended to wonder a little what she was talking

about, but she scarcely explained. She only went on, through untraceable transitions : "The least she can do is to come. I have been very kind to her son. That's not a reason for my going to her—it's a reason for her coming to me. Besides, if she doesn't like what I've done, she can leave me alone. I want to get into European society, but I want to get in in my own way. I don't want to run after people ; I want them to run after me. I guess they will, some day !" Waterville listened to this with his eyes on the ground ; he felt himself blushing a little. There was something in Mrs. Headway that shocked and mortified him, and Littlemore had been right in saying that she had a deficiency of shading. She was terribly distinct ; her motives, her impulses, her desires, were absolutely glaring. She needed to see, to hear, her own thoughts. Vehement thought, with Mrs. Headway, was inevitably speech, though speech was not always thought, and now she had suddenly become vehement. "If she does once come—then, ah, then, shall be too perfect with her ; I shan't let her go ! But she must take the first step. I confess, I hope she'll be nice."

"Perhaps she won't," said Waterville perversely.

"Well, I don't care if she isn't. He has never told me anything about her ; never a word about any of his own belongings. If I wished, I might believe he's ashamed of them."

"I don't think it's that."

"I know it isn't. I know what it is. It's just modesty. He doesn't want to brag—he's too much of a gentleman. He doesn't want to dazzle me—he wants me to like him for himself. Well, I do like him," she added in a moment. "But I shall like him still better if he brings his mother. They shall know that in America."

"Do you think it will make an impression in America?" Waterville asked, smiling.

"It will show them that I am visited by the British aristocracy. They won't like that."

"Surely they grudge you no innocent pleasure," Waterville murmured, smiling still.

"They grudged me common politeness—when I was in New York! Did you ever hear how they treated me, when I came on from the West?"

Waterville stared; this episode was quite new to him. His companion had turned towards him; her pretty head was tossed back like a flower in the wind; there was a flush in her cheek, a sharper light in her eye. "Ah! my dear New Yorkers, they're incapable of rudeness!" cried the young man.

"You're one of them, I see. But I don't speak of the men. The men were well enough—though they did allow it."

"Allow what, Mrs. Headway?" Waterville was quite in the dark.

She wouldn't answer at once; her eyes, glittering a little, were fixed upon absent images. "What did you hear about me over there? Don't pretend you heard nothing."

He had heard nothing at all; there had not been a word about Mrs. Headway in New York. He couldn't pretend, and he was obliged to tell her this. "But I have been away," he added, "and in America I didn't go out. There's nothing to go out for in New York—only little boys and girls."

"There are plenty of old women! They decided I was improper. I'm very well known in the West—I'm known from Chicago to San Francisco—if not personally (in all cases), at least by reputation. People can tell you out there. In New York they decided I wasn't good enough. Not good enough for New York! What do you say to that?" And she gave a sweet little laugh. Whether she had struggled with her pride before making this avowal, Waterville never knew. The crudity of the

avowal seemed to indicate that she had no pride, and yet there was a spot in her heart which, as he now perceived, was intensely sore, and had suddenly begun to throb. "I took a house for the winter—one of the handsomest houses in the place—but I sat there all alone. They didn't think me proper. Such as you see me here, I wasn't a success! I tell you the truth at whatever cost. Not a decent woman came to see me!"

Waterville was embarrassed; diplomatist as he was, he hardly knew what line to take. He could not see what need there was of her telling him the truth, though the incident appeared to have been most curious, and he was glad to know the facts on the best authority. It was the first he knew of this remarkable woman's having spent a winter in his native city—which was virtually a proof of her having come and gone in complete obscurity. It was vain for him to pretend that he had been a good deal away, for he had been appointed to his post in London only six months before, and Mrs. Headway's social failure preceded that event. In the midst of these reflections he had an inspiration. He attempted neither to explain, to minimise, nor to apologise; he ventured simply to lay his hand for an instant on her own and to exclaim, as tenderly as possible, "I wish I had known you were there!"

"I had plenty of men—but men don't count. If they are not a positive help, they're a hindrance, and the more you have, the worse it looks. The women simply turned their backs."

"They were afraid of you—they were jealous," Waterville said.

"It's very good of you to try and explain it away; all I know is, not one of them crossed my threshold. You needn't try and tone it down; I know perfectly how the case stands. In New York, if you please, I was a failure!"

"So much the worse for New York!" cried Water-

ville, who, as he afterwards said to Littlemore, had got quite worked up.

"And now you know why I want to get into society over here?" She jumped up and stood before him; with a dry hard smile she looked down at him. Her smile itself was an answer to her question; it expressed an urgent desire for revenge. There was an abruptness in her movements which left Waterville quite behind; but as he still sat there, returning her glance, he felt that he at last, in the light of that smile, the flash of that almost fierce question, understood Mrs. Headway.

She turned away, to walk to the gate of the garden, and he went with her, laughing vaguely, uneasily, at her tragic tone. Of course she expected him to help her to her revenge; but his female relations, his mother and his sisters, his innumerable cousins, had been a party to the slight she suffered, and he reflected as he walked along that after all they had been right. They had been right in not going to see a woman who could chatter that way about her social wrongs; whether Mrs. Headway were respectable or not, they had a correct instinct, for at any rate she was vulgar. European society might let her in, but European society would be wrong. New York, Waterville said to himself with a glow of civic pride, was quite capable of taking a higher stand in such a matter than London. They went some distance without speaking; at last he said, expressing honestly the thought which at that moment was uppermost in his mind, "I hate that phrase, 'getting into society.' I don't think one ought to attribute to one's self that sort of ambition. One ought to assume that one is in society—that one *is* society—and to hold that if one has good manners, one has, from the social point of view, achieved the great thing. The rest regards others."

For a moment she appeared not to understand; then she broke out: "Well, I suppose I haven't good manners; at any rate, I'm not satisfied! Of course, I

don't talk right—I know that very well. But let me get where I want to first—then I'll look after my expressions. If I once get there, I shall be perfect!" she cried, with a tremor of passion. They reached the gate of the garden and stood a moment outside, opposite to the low arcade of the Odéon, lined with bookstalls, at which Waterville cast a slightly wistful glance, waiting for Mrs. Headway's carriage, which had drawn up at a short distance. The whiskered Max had seated himself within, and on the tense elastic cushions had fallen into a doze. The carriage got into motion without his awaking; he came to his senses only as it stopped again. He started up, staring; then, without confusion, he proceeded to descend.

"I have learned it in Italy—they say the *siesta*," he remarked, with an agreeable smile, holding the door open to Mrs. Headway.

"Well, I should think you had!" this lady replied, laughing amicably as she got into the vehicle, whither Waterville followed her. It was not a surprise to him to perceive that she spoiled her courier; she naturally would spoil her courier. But civilisation begins at home, said Waterville; and the incident threw an ironical light upon her desire to get into society. It failed, however, to divert her thoughts from the subject she was discussing with Waterville, for as Max ascended the box and the carriage went on its way, she threw out another little note of defiance. "If once I'm all right over here, I can snap my fingers at New York! You'll see the faces those women will make."

Waterville was sure his mother and sisters would make no faces; but he felt afresh, as the carriage rolled back to the Hôtel Meurice, that now he understood Mrs. Headway. As they were about to enter the court of the hotel a closed carriage passed before them, and while a few moments later he helped his companion to alight, he saw that Sir Arthur Demesne had descended from the other vehicle. Sir Arthur perceived Mrs. Headway,

and instantly gave his hand to a lady seated in the *coupé*. This lady emerged with a certain slow impressiveness, and as she stood before the door of the hotel—a woman still young and fair, with a good deal of height, gentle, tranquil, plainly dressed, yet distinctly imposing—Waterville saw that the baronet had brought his mother to call upon Nancy Beck. Mrs. Headway's triumph had begun; the Dowager Lady Demesne had taken the first step. Waterville wondered whether the ladies in New York, notified by some magnetic wave, were distorting their features. Mrs. Headway, quickly conscious of what had happened, was neither too prompt to appropriate the visit, nor too slow to acknowledge it. She just paused, smiling at Sir Arthur.

"I wish to introduce my mother—she wants very much to know you." He approached Mrs. Headway; the lady had taken his arm. She was at once simple, and circumspect; she had all the resources of an English matron.

Mrs. Headway, without advancing a step, put out her hands as if to draw her visitor quickly closer. "I declare, you're too sweet!" Waterville heard her say.

He was turning away, as his own business was over; but the young Englishman, who had surrendered his mother to the embrace, as it might now almost be called, of their hostess, just checked him with a friendly gesture. "I daresay I shan't see you again—I'm going away."

"Good-bye, then," said Waterville. "You return to England?"

"No; I go to Cannes, with my mother."

"You remain at Cannes?"

"Till Christmas very likely."

The ladies, escorted by Mr. Max, had passed into the hotel, and Waterville presently quitted his interlocutor. He smiled as he walked away, reflecting that this personage had obtained a concession from his mother only at the price of a concession.

The next morning he went to see Littlemore, from

whom he had a standing invitation to breakfast, and, who, as usual, was smoking a cigar, and looking through a dozen newspapers. Littlemore had a large apartment, and an accomplished cook ; he got up late and wandered about his room all the morning, stopping from time to time to look out of his windows, which overhung the Place de la Madeleine. They had not been seated many minutes at breakfast when Waterville announced that Mrs. Headway was about to be abandoned by Sir Arthur, who was going to Cannes.

"That's no news to me," Littlemore said. "He came last night to bid me good-bye."

"To bid you good-bye? He was very civil all of a sudden."

"He didn't come from civility—he came from curiosity. Having dined here, he had a pretext for calling."

"I hope his curiosity was satisfied," Waterville remarked, in the manner of a person who could enter into such a sentiment.

Littlemore hesitated. "Well, I suspect not. He sat here some time, but we talked about everything but what he wanted to know."

"And what did he want to know?"

"Whether I know anything against Nancy Beck."

Waterville stared. "Did he call her Nancy Beck?"

"We never mentioned her ; but I saw what he wanted, and that he wanted me to lead up to her—only I wouldn't do it."

"Ah, poor man !" Waterville murmured.

"I don't see why you pity him," said Littlemore.

"Mrs. Beck's admirers were never pitied."

"Well, of course he wants to marry her."

"Let him do it, then. I have nothing to say to it."

"He believes there's something in her past that's hard to swallow."

"Let him leave it alone, then."

"How can he, if he's in love with her?" Waterville

asked, in the tone of a man who could enter into that sentiment too.

"Ah, my dear fellow, he must settle it himself. He has no right, at any rate, to ask me such a question. There was a moment, just as he was going, when he had it on his tongue's end. He stood there in the doorway, he couldn't leave me—he was going to plump out with it. He looked at me straight, and I looked straight at him; we remained that way for almost a minute. Then he decided to hold his tongue, and took himself off."

Waterville listened to this little description with intense interest. "And if he had asked you, what would you have said?"

"What do you think?"

"Well, I suppose you would have said that his question wasn't fair?"

"That would have been tantamount to admitting the worst."

"Yes," said Waterville, thoughtfully, "you couldn't do that. On the other hand, if he had put it to you on your honour, whether she were a woman to marry, it would have been very awkward."

"Awkward enough. Fortunately, he has no business to put things to me on my honour. Moreover, nothing has passed between us to give him the right to ask me questions about Mrs. Headway. As she is a great friend of mine, he can't pretend to expect me to give confidential information about her."

"You don't think she's a woman to marry, all the same," Waterville declared. "And if a man were to ask you that, you might knock him down, but it wouldn't be an answer."

"It would have to serve," said Littlemore. He added in a moment, "There are certain cases where it's a man's duty to commit perjury."

Waterville looked grave. "Certain cases?"

"Where a woman's honour is at stake."

"I see what you mean. That's of course if he has been himself concerned——"

"Himself, or another. It doesn't matter."

"I think it does matter. I don't like perjury," said Waterville. "It's a delicate question."

They were interrupted by the arrival of the servant with a second course, and Littlemore gave a laugh as he helped himself. "It would be a joke to see her married to that superior being!"

"It would be a great responsibility."

"Responsibility or not, it would be very amusing."

"Do you mean to assist her, then?"

"Heaven forbid! But I mean to bet on her."

Waterville gave his companion a serious glance; he thought him strangely superficial. The situation, however, was difficult, and he laid down his fork, with a little sigh.

VI.

THE Easter holidays that year were unusually genial; mild watery sunshine assisted the progress of the spring. The high, dense hedges, in Warwickshire, were like walls of hawthorn imbedded in banks of primrose, and the finest trees in England, springing out of them with a regularity which suggested conservative principles, began to cover themselves with a kind of green downiness. Rupert Waterville, devoted to his duties and faithful in attendance at the Legation, had had little time to enjoy that rural hospitality which is the great invention of the English people, and the most perfect expression of their character. He had been invited now and then—for in London he commended himself to many people as a very sensible young man—but he had been obliged to decline more proposals than he accepted. It was still, therefore,

rather a novelty to him to stay at one of those fine old houses, surrounded with hereditary acres, which from the first of his coming to England he had thought of with such curiosity and such envy. He proposed to himself to see as many of them as possible, but he disliked to do things in a hurry, or when his mind was preoccupied, as it was so apt to be, with what he believed to be business of importance. He kept the country-houses in reserve ; he would take them up in their order, after he should have got a little more used to London. Without hesitation, however, he had accepted the invitation to Longlands ; it had come to him in a simple and familiar note from Lady Demesne, with whom he had no acquaintance. He knew of her return from Cannes, where she had spent the whole winter, for he had seen it related in a Sunday newspaper ; yet it was with a certain surprise that he heard from her in these informal terms. "Dear Mr. Waterville," she wrote, "my son tells me that you will perhaps be able to come down here on the 17th, to spend two or three days. If you can, it will give us much pleasure. We can promise you the society of your charming countrywoman, Mrs. Headway."

He had seen Mrs. Headway ; she had written to him a fortnight before from an hotel in Cork Street, to say that she had arrived in London for the season, and should be very glad to see him. He had gone to see her, trembling with the fear that she would break ground about her presentation ; but he was agreeably surprised to observe that she neglected this topic. She had spent the winter in Rome, travelling directly from that city to England, with just a little stop in Paris, to buy a few clothes. She had taken much satisfaction in Rome, where she made many friends ; she assured him that she knew half the Roman nobility. "They are charming people ; they have only one fault, they stay too long," she said. And, in answer to his inquiring glance, "I mean when they come to see you," she explained. "They

used to come every evening, and they wanted to stay till the next day. They were all princes and counts. I used to give them cigars, etc. I knew as many people as I wanted," she added, in a moment, discovering perhaps in Waterville's eye the traces of that sympathy with which six months before he had listened to her account of her discomfiture in New York. "There were lots of English; I knew all the English, and I mean to visit them here. The Americans waited to see what the English would do, so as to do the opposite. Thanks to that, I was spared some precious specimens. There are, you know, some fearful ones. Besides, in Rome, society doesn't matter, if you have a feeling for the ruins and the Campagna; I had an immense feeling for the Campagna. I was always mooning round in some damp old temple. It reminded me a good deal of the country round San Diego—if it hadn't been for the temples. I liked to think it all over, when I was driving round; I was always brooding over the past." At this moment, however, Mrs. Headway had dismissed the past; she was prepared to give herself up wholly to the actual. She wished Waterville to advise her as to how she should live—what she should do. Should she stay at a hotel or should she take a house? She guessed she had better take a house, if she could find a nice one. Max wanted to look for one, and she didn't know but she'd let him; he got her such a nice one in Rome. She said nothing about Sir Arthur Demesne, who, it seemed to Waterville, would have been her natural guide and sponsor; he wondered whether her relations with the baronet had come to an end. Waterville had met him a couple of times since the opening of Parliament, and they had exchanged twenty words, none of which, however, had reference to Mrs. Headway. Waterville had been recalled to London just after the incident of which he was witness in the court of the Hôtel Meurice; and all he knew of its consequence was what he had learned from Littlemore, who, on his

way back to America, where he had suddenly ascertained that there were reasons for his spending the winter, passed through the British capital. Littlemore had reported that Mrs. Headway was enchanted with Lady Demesne, and had no words to speak of her kindness and sweetness. "She told me she liked to know her son's friends, and I told her I liked to know my friends' mothers," Mrs. Headway had related. "I should be willing to be old if I could be like that," she had added, oblivious for the moment that she could scarcely pretend to belong to a budding generation. The mother and son, at any rate, had retired to Cannes together, and at this moment Littlemore had received letters from home which caused him to start for Arizona. Mrs. Headway had accordingly been left to her own devices, and he was afraid she had bored herself, though Mrs. Bagshaw had called upon her. In November she had travelled to Italy, not by way of Cannes.

"What do you suppose she'll do in Rome?" Waterville had asked; his imagination failing him here, for he had not yet trodden the Seven Hills.

"I haven't the least idea. And I don't care!" Littlemore added in a moment. Before he left London he mentioned to Waterville that Mrs. Headway, on his going to take leave of her in Paris, had made another, and a rather unexpected attack. "About the society business—she said I must really do something—she couldn't go on in that way. And she appealed to me in the name—I don't think I quite know how to say it."

"I should be very glad if you would try," said Waterville, who was constantly reminding himself that Americans in Europe were, after all, in a manner, to a man in his position, as the sheep to the shepherd.

"Well, in the name of the affection that we had formerly entertained for each other."

"The affection?"

"So she was good enough to call it. But I deny it all. If one had to have an affection for every woman

one used to sit up 'evenings' with——!" And Littlemore paused, not defining the result of such an obligation. Waterville tried to imagine what it would be; while his friend embarked for New York, without telling him how, after all, he had resisted Mrs. Headway's attack.

At Christmas Waterville knew of Sir Arthur's return to England, and believed that he also knew that the baronet had not gone down to Rome. He had a theory that Lady Demesne was a very clever woman—clever enough to make her son do what she preferred, and yet also make him think it his own choice. She had been politic, accommodating, about going to see Mrs. Headway; but, having seen her and judged her, she had determined to break the thing off. She had been sweet and kind, as Mrs. Headway said, because for the moment that was easiest; but she had made her last visit on the same occasion as her first. She had been sweet and kind, but she had set her face as a stone, and if poor Mrs. Headway, arriving in London for the season, expected to find any vague promises redeemed, she would taste of the bitterness of shattered hopes. He had made up his mind that, shepherd as he was, and Mrs. Headway one of his sheep, it was none of his present duty to run about after her, especially as she could be trusted not to stray too far. He saw her a second time, and she still said nothing about Sir Arthur. Waterville, who always had a theory, said to himself that she was waiting, that the baronet had not turned up. She was also getting into a house; the courier had found her in Chesterfield Street, Mayfair, a little gem, which was to cost her what jewels cost. After all this, Waterville was greatly surprised at Lady Demesne's note, and he went down to Longlands with much the same impatience with which, in Paris, he would have gone, if he had been able, to the first night of a new comedy. It seemed to him that, through a sudden stroke of good fortune, he had received a *billet d'auteur*.

It was agreeable to him to arrive at an English country-house at the close of the day. He liked the drive from the station in the twilight, the sight of the fields and copses and cottages, vague and lonely in contrast to his definite, lighted goal; the sound of the wheels on the long avenue, which turned and wound repeatedly without bringing him to what he reached however at last—the wide, gray front, with a glow in its scattered windows and a sweep of still firmer gravel up to the door. The front at Longlands, which was of this sober complexion, had a grand, pompous air; it was attributed to the genius of Sir Christopher Wren. There were wings which came forward in a semicircle, with statues placed at intervals on the cornice; so that in the flattering dusk it looked like an Italian palace, erected through some magical evocation in an English park. Waterville had taken a late train, which left him but twenty minutes to dress for dinner. He prided himself considerably on the art of dressing both quickly and well; but this operation left him no time to inquire whether the apartment to which he had been assigned befitted the dignity of a Secretary of Legation. On emerging from his room he found there was an ambassador in the house, and this discovery was a check to uneasy reflections. He tacitly assumed that he would have had a better room if it had not been for the ambassador, who was of course counted first. The large brilliant house gave an impression of the last century and of foreign taste, of light colours, high vaulted ceilings, with pale mythological frescoes, gilded doors, surmounted by old French panels, faded tapestries and delicate damasks, stores of ancient china, among which great jars of pink roses were conspicuous. The people in the house had assembled for dinner in the principal hall, which was animated by a fire of great logs, and the company was so numerous that Waterville was afraid he was the last. Lady Demesne gave him a smile and a touch of her hand; she was very tranquil, and, saying

nothing in particular, treated him as if he had been a constant visitor. Waterville was not sure whether he liked this or hated it; but these alternatives mattered equally little to his hostess, who looked at her guests as if to see whether the number were right. The master of the house was talking to a lady before the fire; when he caught sight of Waterville across the room, he waved him "how d'ye do," with an air of being delighted to see him. He had never had that air in Paris, and Waterville had a chance to observe, what he had often heard, to how much greater advantage the English appear in their country-houses. Lady Demesne turned to him again, with her sweet vague smile, which looked as if it were the same for everything.

"We are waiting for Mrs. Headway," she said.

"Ah, she has arrived?" Waterville had quite forgotten her.

"She came at half-past five. At six she went to dress. She has had two hours."

"Let us hope that the results will be proportionate," said Waterville, smiling.

"Oh, the results; I don't know," Lady Demesne murmured, without looking at him; and in these simple words Waterville saw the confirmation of his theory that she was playing a deep game. He wondered whether he should sit next to Mrs. Headway at dinner, and hoped, with due deference to this lady's charms, that he should have something more novel. The results of a toilet which she had protracted through two hours were presently visible. She appeared on the staircase which descended to the hall, and which, for three minutes, as she came down rather slowly, facing the people beneath, placed her in considerable relief. Waterville, as he looked at her, felt that this was a moment of importance for her: it was virtually her entrance into English society. Mrs. Headway entered English society very well, with her charming smile upon her lips, and with the trophies of the

Rue de la Paix trailing behind her. She made a portentous rustling as she moved. People turned their eyes toward her ; there was soon a perceptible diminution of talk, though talk had not been particularly audible. She looked very much alone, and it was rather pretentious of her to come down last, though it was possible that this was simply because, before her glass, she had been unable to please herself. For she evidently felt the importance of the occasion, and Waterville was sure that her heart was beating. She was very valiant, however ; she smiled more intensely, and advanced like a woman who was used to being looked at. She had at any rate the support of knowing that she was pretty ; for nothing on this occasion was wanting to her prettiness, and the determination to succeed, which might have made her hard, was veiled in the virtuous consciousness that she had neglected nothing. Lady Demesne went forward to meet her ; Sir Arthur took no notice of her ; and presently Waterville found himself proceeding to dinner with the wife of an ecclesiastic, to whom Lady Demesne had presented him for this purpose, when the hall was almost empty. The rank of this ecclesiastic in the hierarchy he learned early on the morrow ; but in the meantime it seemed to him strange, somehow, that in England ecclesiastics should have wives. English life, even at the end of a year, was full of those surprises. The lady, however, was very easily accounted for ; she was in no sense a violent exception, and there had been no need of the Reformation to produce her. Her name was Mrs. April ; she was wrapped in a large lace shawl ; to eat her dinner she removed but one glove, and the other gave Waterville at moments an odd impression that the whole repast, in spite of its great completeness, was something of the picnic order. Mrs. Headway was opposite, at a little distance ; she had been taken in, as Waterville learned from his neighbour, by a general, a gentleman with a lean aquiline face and a cultivated whisker, and she had

on the other side a smart young man of an identity less definite. Poor Sir Arthur sat between two ladies much older than himself, whose names, redolent of history, Waterville had often heard, and had associated with figures more romantic. Mrs. Headway gave Waterville no greeting; she evidently had not seen him till they were seated at table, when she simply stared at him with a violence of surprise that for a moment almost effaced her smile. It was a copious and well-ordered banquet, but as Waterville looked up and down the table he wondered whether some of its elements might not be a little dull. As he made this reflection he became conscious that he was judging the affair much more from Mrs. Headway's point of view than from his own. He knew no one but Mrs. April, who, displaying an almost motherly desire to give him information, told him the names of many of their companions; in return for which he explained to her that he was not in that set. Mrs. Headway got on in perfection with her general; Waterville watched her more than he appeared to do, and saw that the general, who evidently was a cool hand, was drawing her out. Waterville hoped she would be careful. He was a man of fancy, in his way, and as he compared her with the rest of the company he said to himself that she was a very plucky little woman, and that her present undertaking had a touch of the heroic. She was alone against many, and her opponents were a very serried phalanx; those who were there represented a thousand others. They looked so different from her that to the eye of the imagination she stood very much on her merits. All those people seemed so completely made up, so unconscious of effort, so surrounded with things to rest upon; the men with their clean complexions, their well-hung chins, their cold, pleasant eyes, their shoulders set back, their absence of gesture; the women, several very handsome, half strangled in strings of pearls, with smooth plain tresses, seeming to look at nothing in particular,

supporting silence as if it were as becoming as candle-light, yet talking a little, sometimes, in fresh rich voices. They were all wrapped in a community of ideas, of traditions; they understood each other's accent, even each other's variations. Mrs. Headway, with all her prettiness, seemed to transcend these variations; she looked foreign, exaggerated; she had too much expression; she might have been engaged for the evening. Waterville remarked, moreover, that English society was always looking out for amusement, and that its transactions were conducted on a cash basis. If Mrs. Headway were amusing enough she would probably succeed, and her fortune—if fortune there was—would not be a hindrance.

In the drawing-room, after dinner, he went up to her, but she gave him no greeting. She only looked at him with an expression he had never seen before—a strange, bold expression of displeasure.

“Why have you come down here?” she asked.
“Have you come to watch me?”

Waterville coloured to the roots of his hair. He knew it was terribly little like a diplomatist; but he was unable to control his blushes. Besides, he was shocked, he was angry, and in addition, he was mystified. “I came because I was asked,” he said.

“Who asked you?”

“The same person that asked you, I suppose—Lady Demesne.”

“She's an old cat!” Mrs. Headway exclaimed, turning away from him.

He turned away from her as well. He didn't know what he had done to deserve such treatment. It was a complete surprise; he had never seen her like that before. She was a very vulgar woman; that was the way people talked, he supposed, at San Diego. He threw himself almost passionately into the conversation of the others, who all seemed to him, possibly a little by contrast, extraordinarily genial and friendly. He had not, how-

ever, the consolation of seeing Mrs. Headway punished for her rudeness, for she was not in the least neglected. On the contrary, in the part of the room where she sat the group was denser, and every now and then it was agitated with unanimous laughter. If she should amuse them, he said to himself, she would succeed, and evidently she was amusing them.

VII.

IF she was strange, he had not come to the end of her strangeness. The next day was a Sunday, and uncommonly fine ; he was down before breakfast, and took a walk in the park, stopping to gaze at the thin-legged deer, scattered like pins on a velvet cushion over some of the remoter slopes, and wandering along the edge of a large sheet of ornamental water, which had a temple, in imitation of that of Vesta, on an island in the middle. He thought at this time no more about Mrs. Headway ; he only reflected that these stately objects had for more than a hundred years furnished a background to a great deal of family history. A little more reflection would perhaps have suggested to him that Mrs. Headway was possibly an incident of some importance in the history of a family. Two or three ladies failed to appear at breakfast ; Mrs. Headway was one of them.

"She tells me she never leaves her room till noon," he heard Lady Demesne say to the general, her companion of the previous evening, who had asked about her. "She takes three hours to dress."

"She's a monstrous clever woman !" the general exclaimed.

"To do it in three hours ?"

"No, I mean the way she keeps her wits about her."

"Yes ; I think she's very clever," said Lady Demesne, in a tone in which Waterville flattered himself that he saw more meaning than the general could see. There was something in this tall, straight, deliberate woman, who seemed at once benevolent and distant, that Waterville admired. With her delicate surface, her conventional mildness, he could see that she was very strong ; she had set her patience upon a height, and she carried it like a diadem. She had very little to say to Waterville, but every now and then she made some inquiry of him that showed she had not forgotten him. Demesne himself was apparently in excellent spirits, though there was nothing bustling in his deportment, and he only went about looking very fresh and fair, as if he took a bath every hour or two, and very secure against the unexpected. Waterville had less conversation with him than with his mother ; but the young man had found occasion to say to him the night before, in the smoking-room, that he was delighted Waterville had been able to come, and that if he was fond of real English scenery there were several things about there he should like very much to show him.

"You must give me an hour or two before you go, you know ; I really think there are some things you'll like."

Sir Arthur spoke as if Waterville would be very fastidious ; he seemed to wish to attach a vague importance to him. On the Sunday morning after breakfast he asked Waterville if he should care to go to church ; most of the ladies and several of the men were going.

"It's just as you please, you know ; but it's rather a pretty walk across the fields, and a curious little church of King Stephen's time."

Waterville knew what this meant ; it was already a picture. Besides, he liked going to church, especially when he sat in the Squire's pew, which was sometimes as big as a boudoir. So he replied that he should be

delighted. Then he added, without explaining his reason—

“Is Mrs. Headway going?”

“I really don’t know,” said his host, with an abrupt change of tone—as if Waterville had asked him whether the housekeeper were going.

“The English are awfully queer!” Waterville indulged mentally in this exclamation, to which since his arrival in England he had had recourse whenever he encountered a gap in the consistency of things. The church was even a better picture than Sir Arthur’s description of it, and Waterville said to himself that Mrs. Headway had been a great fool not to come. He knew what she was after; she wished to study English life, so that she might take possession of it, and to pass in among a hedge of bobbing rustics, and sit among the monuments of the old Demesnes, would have told her a great deal about English life. If she wished to fortify herself for the struggle she had better come to that old church. When he returned to Longlands—he had walked back across the meadows with the canon’s wife, who was a vigorous pedestrian—it wanted half an hour of luncheon, and he was unwilling to go indoors. He remembered that he had not yet seen the gardens, and he wandered away in search of them. They were on a scale which enabled him to find them without difficulty, and they looked as if they had been kept up unremittingly for a century or two. He had not advanced very far between their blooming borders when he heard a voice that he recognised, and a moment after, at the turn of an alley, he came upon Mrs. Headway, who was attended by the master of Longlands. She was bareheaded beneath her parasol, which she flung back, stopping short, as she beheld her compatriot.

“Oh, it’s Mr. Waterville come to spy me out, as usual!” It was with this remark that she greeted the slightly-embarrassed young man.

“Hallo ! you’ve come home from church,” Sir Arthur said, pulling out his watch.

Waterville was struck with his coolness. He admired it ; for, after all, he said to himself, it must have been disagreeable to him to be interrupted. He felt a little like a fool, and wished he had kept Mrs. April with him, to give him the air of having come for her sake.

Mrs. Headway looked adorably fresh, in a toilet which Waterville, who had his ideas on such matters, was sure would not be regarded as the proper thing for a Sunday morning in an English country-house : a *négligé* of white flounces and frills, interspersed with yellow ribbons—a garment which Madame de Pompadour might have worn when she received a visit from Louis XV., but would probably not have worn when she went into the world. The sight of this costume gave the finishing touch to Waterville’s impression that Mrs. Headway knew, on the whole, what she was about. She would take a line of her own ; she would not be too accommodating. She would not come down to breakfast ; she would not go to church ; she would wear on Sunday mornings little elaborately informal dresses, and look dreadfully un-British and un-Protestant. Perhaps, after all, this was better. She began to talk with a certain volubility.

“Isn’t this too lovely ? I walked all the way from the house. I’m not much at walking, but the grass in this place is like a parlour. The whole thing is beyond everything. Sir Arthur, you ought to go and look after the Ambassador ; it’s shameful the way I’ve kept you. You didn’t care about the Ambassador ? You said just now you had scarcely spoken to him, and you must make it up. I never saw such a way of neglecting your guests. Is that the usual style over here ? Go and take him out for a ride, or make him play a game of billiards. Mr. Waterville will take me home ; besides, I want to scold him for spying on me.”

Waterville sharply resented this accusation. "I had no idea you were here," he declared.

"We weren't hiding," said Sir Arthur quietly. "Perhaps you'll see Mrs. Headway back to the house. I think I ought to look after old Davidoff. I believe lunch is at two."

He left them, and Waterville wandered through the gardens with Mrs. Headway. She immediately wished to know if he had come there to look after her; but this inquiry was accompanied, to his surprise, with the acrimony she had displayed the night before. He was determined not to let that pass, however; when people had treated him in that way they should not be allowed to forget it.

"Do you suppose I am always thinking of you?" he asked. "You're out of my mind sometimes. I came here to look at the gardens, and if you hadn't spoken to me I should have passed on."

Mrs. Headway was perfectly good-natured; she appeared not even to hear his defence. "He has got two other places," she simply rejoined. "That's just what I wanted to know."

But Waterville would not be turned away from his grievance. That mode of reparation to a person whom you had insulted, which consisted in forgetting that you had done so, was doubtless largely in use in New Mexico; but a person of honour demanded something more. "What did you mean last night by accusing me of having come down here to watch you? You must excuse me if I tell you that I think you were rather rude." The sting of this accusation lay in the fact that there was a certain amount of truth in it; yet for a moment Mrs. Headway, looking very blank, failed to recognise the allusion. "She's a barbarian, after all," thought Waterville. "She thinks a woman may slap a man's face and run away!"

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Headway, suddenly, "I remember, I was angry with you; I didn't expect to see you.

But I didn't really care about it at all. Every now and then I am angry, like that, and I work it off on any one that's handy. But it's over in three minutes, and I never think of it again. I was angry last night ; I was furious with the old woman."

"With the old woman?"

"With Sir Arthur's mother. She has no business here, any way. In this country, when the husband dies, they're expected to clear out. She has a house of her own, ten miles from here, and she has another in Portman Square ; so she's got plenty of places to live. But she sticks—she sticks to him like a plaster. All of a sudden it came over me that she didn't invite me here because she liked me, but because she suspects me. She's afraid we'll make a match, and she thinks I ain't good enough for her son. She must think I'm in a great hurry to get hold of him. I never went after him, he came after me. I should never have thought of anything if it hadn't been for him. He began it last summer at Homburg ; he wanted to know why I didn't come to England ; he told me I should have great success. He doesn't know much about it, any way ; he hasn't got much gumption. But he's a very nice man, all the same ; it's very pleasant to see him surrounded by his——" And Mrs. Headway paused a moment, looking admiringly about her—"Surrounded by all his old heirlooms. I like the old place," she went on ; "it's beautifully mounted ; I'm quite satisfied with what I've seen. I thought Lady Demesne was very friendly ; she left a card on me in London, and very soon after, she wrote to me to ask me here. But I'm very quick ; I sometimes see things in a flash. I saw something yesterday, when she came to speak to me at dinner-time. She saw I looked pretty, and it made her blue with rage ; she hoped I would be ugly. I should like very much to oblige her ; but what can one do ? Then I saw that she had asked me here only because he insisted. He didn't come to see me when I first arrived

—he never came near me for ten days. She managed to prevent him ; she got him to make some promise. But he changed his mind after a little, and then he had to do something really polite. He called three days in succession, and he made her come. She's one of those women that resists as long as she can, and then seems to give in, while she's really resisting more than ever. She hates me like poison ; I don't know what she thinks I've done. She's very underhand ; she's a regular old cat. When I saw you last night at dinner, I thought she had got you here to help her."

"To help her?" Waterville asked.

"To tell her about me. To give her information, that she can make use of against me. You may tell her what you like!"

Waterville was almost breathless with the attention he had given this extraordinary burst of confidence, and now he really felt faint. He stopped short ; Mrs. Headway went on a few steps, and then, stopping too, turned and looked at him. "You're the most unspeakable woman !" he exclaimed. She seemed to him indeed a barbarian.

She laughed at him—he felt she was laughing at his expression of face—and her laugh rang through the stately gardens. "What sort of a woman is that?"

"You've got no delicacy," said Waterville, resolutely.

She coloured quickly, though, strange to say, she appeared not to be angry. "No delicacy?" she repeated.

"You ought to keep those things to yourself."

"Oh, I know what you mean ; I talk about everything. When I'm excited I've got to talk. But I must do things in my own way. I've got plenty of delicacy, when people are nice to me. Ask Arthur Demesne if I ain't delicate—ask George Littlemore if I ain't. Don't stand there all day ; come in to lunch !" And Mrs. Headway resumed her walk, while Rupert Waterville, raising his eyes for a moment, slowly overtook her.

“Wait till I get settled ; then I’ll be delicate,” she pursued. “You can’t be delicate when you’re trying to save your life. It’s very well for *you* to talk, with the whole American Legation to back you. Of course I’m excited. I’ve got hold of this thing, and I don’t mean to let go !” Before they reached the house she told him why he had been invited to Longlands at the same time as herself. Waterville would have liked to believe that his personal attractions sufficiently explained the fact ; but she took no account of this supposition. Mrs. Headway preferred to think that she lived in an element of ingenious machination, and that most things that happened had reference to herself. Waterville had been asked because he represented, however modestly, the American Legation, and their host had a friendly desire to make it appear that this pretty American visitor, of whom no one knew anything, was under the protection of that establishment. “It would start me better,” said Mrs. Headway, serenely. “You can’t help yourself—you’ve helped to start me. If he had known the Minister he would have asked him—or the first secretary. But he don’t know them.”

They reached the house by the time Mrs. Headway had developed this idea, which gave Waterville a pretext more than sufficient for detaining her in the portico. “Do you mean to say Sir Arthur told you this?” he inquired, almost sternly.

“Told me? Of course not ! Do you suppose I would let him take the tone with me that I need any favours? I should like to hear him tell me that I’m in want of assistance !”

“I don’t see why he shouldn’t—at the pace you go yourself. You say it to every one.”

“To every one? I say it to you, and to George Littlemore—when I’m nervous. I say it to you because I like you, and to him because I’m afraid of him. I’m not in the least afraid of you, by the way. I’m all alone

—I haven't got any one. I must have some comfort, mustn't I? Sir Arthur scolded me for putting you off last night—he noticed it; and that was what made me guess his idea.”

“I'm much obliged to him,” said Waterville, rather bewildered.

“So mind you answer for me. Don't you want to give me your arm, to go in?”

“You're a most extraordinary combination,” he murmured, as she stood smiling at him.

“Oh, come, don't *you* fall in love with me!” she cried, with a laugh; and, without taking his arm, passed in before him.

That evening, before he went to dress for dinner, Waterville wandered into the library, where he felt sure that he should find some superior bindings. There was no one in the room, and he spent a happy half-hour among the treasures of literature and the triumphs of old morocco. He had a great esteem for good literature; he held that it should have handsome covers. The daylight had begun to wane, but whenever, in the rich-looking dimness, he made out the glimmer of a well-gilded back, he took down the volume and carried it to one of the deep-set windows. He had just finished the inspection of a delightfully fragrant folio, and was about to carry it back to its niche, when he found himself standing face to face with Lady Demesne. He was startled for a moment, for her tall, slim figure, her fair visage, which looked white in the high, brown room, and the air of serious intention with which she presented herself, gave something spectral to her presence. He saw her smile, however, and heard her say, in that tone of hers which was sweet almost to sadness, “Are you looking at our books? I'm afraid they are rather dull.”

“Dull? Why, they are as bright as the day they were bound.” And he turned the glittering panels of his folio towards her.

“I’m afraid I haven’t looked at them for a long time,” she murmured, going nearer to the window, where she stood looking out. Beyond the clear pane the park stretched away, with the grayness of evening beginning to hang itself on the great limbs of the oaks. The place appeared cold and empty, and the trees had an air of conscious importance, as if nature herself had been bribed somehow to take the side of county families. Lady Demesne was not an easy person to talk with ; she was neither spontaneous nor abundant ; she was conscious of herself, conscious of many things. Her very simplicity was conventional, though it was rather a noble convention. You might have pitied her, if you had seen that she lived in constant unrelaxed communion with certain rigid ideals. This made her at times seem tired, like a person who has undertaken too much. She gave an impression of still brightness, which was not at all brilliancy, but a carefully-preserved purity. She said nothing for a moment, and there was an appearance of design in her silence, as if she wished to let him know that she had a certain business with him, without taking the trouble to announce it. She had been accustomed to expect that people would suppose things, and to be saved the trouble of explanations. Waterville made some haphazard remark about the beauty of the evening (in point of fact, the weather had changed for the worse), to which she vouchsafed no reply. Then, presently, she said, with her usual gentleness, “I hoped I should find you here—I wish to ask you something.”

“Anything I can tell you—I shall be delighted !” Waterville exclaimed.

She gave him a look, not imperious, almost appealing, which seemed to say—“Please be very simple—very simple indeed.” Then she glanced about her, as if there had been other people in the room ; she didn’t wish to appear closeted with him, or to have come on purpose. There she was, at any rate, and she went on. “When

my son told me he should ask you to come down, I was very glad. I mean, of course, that we were delighted——” And she paused a moment. Then she added, simply, “I want to ask you about Mrs. Headway.”

“Ah, here it is!” cried Waterville within himself. More superficially, he smiled, as agreeably as possible, and said, “Ah yes, I see!”

“Do you mind my asking you? I hope you don’t mind. I haven’t any one else to ask.”

“Your son knows her much better than I do.” Waterville said this without an intention of malice, simply to escape from the difficulties of his situation; but after he had said it, he was almost frightened by its mocking sound.

“I don’t think he knows her. She knows him, which is very different. When I ask him about her, he merely tells me she is fascinating. She *is* fascinating,” said her ladyship, with inimitable dryness.

“So I think, myself. I like her very much,” Waterville rejoined, cheerfully.

“You are in all the better position to speak of her, then.”

“To speak well of her,” said Waterville, smiling.

“Of course, if you can. I should be delighted to hear you do that. That’s what I wish—to hear some good of her.”

It might have seemed, after this, that nothing would have remained but for Waterville to launch himself in a panegyric of his mysterious countrywoman; but he was no more to be tempted into that danger than into another. “I can only say I like her,” he repeated. “She has been very kind to me.”

“Every one seems to like her,” said Lady Demesne, with an unstudied effect of pathos. “She is certainly very amusing.”

“She is very good-natured; she has lots of good intentions.”

"What do you call good intentions?" asked Lady Demesne, very sweetly.

"Well, I mean that she wants to be friendly and pleasant."

"Of course you have to defend her. She's your countrywoman."

"To defend her—I must wait till she's attacked," said Waterville, laughing.

"That's very true. I needn't call your attention to the fact that I am not attacking her. I should never attack a person staying in this house. I only want to know something about her, and if you can't tell me, perhaps at least you can mention some one who will."

"She'll tell you herself. Tell you by the hour!"

"What she has told my son? I shouldn't understand it. My son doesn't understand it. It's very strange. I rather hoped you might explain it."

Waterville was silent a moment. "I'm afraid I can't explain Mrs. Headway," he remarked at last.

"I see you admit she is very peculiar."

Waterville hesitated again. "It's too great a responsibility to answer you." He felt that he was very disobliging; he knew exactly what Lady Demesne wished him to say. He was unprepared to blight the reputation of Mrs. Headway to accommodate Lady Demesne; and yet, with his active little imagination, he could enter perfectly into the feelings of this tender, formal, serious woman, who—it was easy to see—had looked for her own happiness in the cultivation of duty and in extreme constancy to two or three objects of devotion chosen once for all. She must, indeed, have had a vision of things which would represent Mrs. Headway as both displeasing and dangerous. But he presently became aware that she had taken his last words as a concession in which she might find help.

"You know why I ask you these things, then?"

"I think I have an idea," said Waterville, persisting

in irrelevant laughter. His laugh sounded foolish in his own ears.

"If you know that, I think you ought to assist me." Her tone changed as she spoke these words; there was a quick tremor in it; he could see it was a confession of distress. Her distress was deep; he immediately felt that it must have been, before she made up her mind to speak to him. He was sorry for her, and determined to be very serious.

"If I could help you I would. But my position is very difficult."

"It's not so difficult as mine!" She was going all lengths; she was really appealing to him. "I don't imagine that you are under any obligation to Mrs. Headway—you seem to me very different," she added.

Waterville was not insensible to any discrimination that told in his favour; but these words gave him a slight shock, as if they had been an attempt at bribery. "I am surprised that you don't like her," he ventured to observe.

Lady Demesne looked out of the window a little. "I don't think you are really surprised, though possibly you try to be. I don't like her, at any rate, and I can't fancy why my son should. She's very pretty, and she appears to be very clever; but I don't trust her. I don't know what has taken possession of him; it is not usual in his family to marry people like that. I don't think she's a lady. The person I should wish for him would be so very different—perhaps you can see what I mean. There's something in her history that we don't understand. My son understands it no better than I. If you could only explain to us, that might be a help. I treat you with great confidence the first time I see you; it's because I don't know where to turn. I am exceedingly anxious."

It was very plain that she was anxious; her manner had become more vehement; her eyes seemed to shine in the thickening dusk. "Are you very sure there is

danger?" Waterville asked. "Has he asked her to marry him, and has she consented?"

"If I wait till they settle it all, it will be too late. I have reason to believe that my son is not engaged, but he is terribly entangled. At the same time he is very uneasy, and that may save him yet. He has a great sense of honour. He is not satisfied about her past life; he doesn't know what to think of what we have been told. Even what she admits is so strange. She has been married four or five times—she has been divorced again and again—it seems so extraordinary. She tells him that in America it is different, and I daresay you have not our ideas; but really there is a limit to everything. There must have been some great irregularities—I am afraid some great scandals. It's dreadful to have to accept such things. He has not told me all this; but it's not necessary he should tell me; I know him well enough to guess."

"Does he know that you have spoken to me?" Waterville asked.

"Not in the least. But I must tell you that I shall repeat to him anything that you may say against her."

"I had better say nothing, then. It's very delicate. Mrs. Headway is quite undefended. One may like her or not, of course. I have seen nothing of her that is not perfectly correct."

"And you have heard nothing?"

Waterville remembered Littlemore's assertion that there were cases in which a man was bound in honour to tell an untruth, and he wondered whether this were such a case. Lady Demesne imposed herself, she made him believe in the reality of her grievance, and he saw the gulf that divided her from a pushing little woman who had lived with Western editors. She was right to wish not to be connected with Mrs. Headway. After all, there had been nothing in his relations with that lady to make it incumbent on him to lie for her. He had not

sought her acquaintance, she had sought his ; she had sent for him to come and see her. And yet he couldn't give her away, as they said in New York ; that stuck in his throat. "I am afraid I really can't say anything. And it wouldn't matter. Your son won't give her up because I happen not to like her."

"If he were to believe she has done wrong, he would give her up."

"Well, I have no right to say so," said Waterville.

Lady Demesne turned away ; she was much disappointed in him. He was afraid she was going to break out—"Why, then, do you suppose I asked you here?" she quitted her place near the window, and was apparently about to leave the room. But she stopped short. "You know something against her, but you won't say it."

Waterville hugged his folio and looked awkward. "You attribute things to me. I shall never say anything."

"Of course you are perfectly free. There is some one else who knows, I think—another American—a gentleman who was in Paris when my son was there. I have forgotten his name."

"A friend of Mrs. Headway's? I suppose you mean George Littlemore."

"Yes—Mr. Littlemore. He has a sister, whom I have met ; I didn't know she was his sister till to-day. Mrs. Headway spoke of her, but I find she doesn't know her. That itself is a proof, I think. Do you think *he* would help me?" Lady Demesne asked, very simply.

"I doubt it, but you can try."

"I wish he had come with you. Do you think he would come?"

"He is in America at this moment, but I believe he soon comes back."

"I shall go to his sister ; I will ask her to bring him

to see me. She is extremely nice ; I think she will understand. Unfortunately there is very little time."

"Don't count too much on Littlemore," said Waterville, gravely.

"You men have no pity "

"Why should we pity you? How can Mrs. Headway hurt such a person as you?"

Lady Demesne hesitated a moment. "It hurts me to hear her voice."

"Her voice is very sweet."

"Possibly. But she's horrible!"

This was too much, it seemed to Waterville ; poor Mrs. Headway was extremely open to criticism, and he himself had declared she was a barbarian. Yet she was not horrible. "It's for your son to pity you. If he doesn't, how can you expect it of others?"

"Oh, but he does!" And with a majesty that was more striking even than her logic, Lady Demesne moved towards the door.

Waterville advanced to open it for her, and as she passed out he said, "There's one thing you can do—try to like her!"

She shot him a terrible glance. "That would be worst of all!"

VIII.

GEORGE LITTLEMORE arrived in London on the twentieth of May, and one of the first things he did was to go and see Waterville at the Legation, where he made known to him that he had taken for the rest of the season a house at Queen Anne's Gate, so that his sister and her husband, who, under the pressure of diminished rents, had let their own town residence, might come up and spend a couple of months with him.

"One of the consequences of your having a house will be that you will have to entertain Mrs. Headway," Waterville said.

Littlemore sat there with his hands crossed upon his stick ; he looked at Waterville with an eye that failed to kindle at the mention of this lady's name. "Has she got into European society?" he asked, rather languidly.

"Very much, I should say. She has a house, and a carriage, and diamonds, and everything handsome. She seems already to know a lot of people ; they put her name in the *Morning Post*. She has come up very quickly ; she's almost famous. Every one is asking about her—you'll be plied with questions."

Littlemore listened gravely. "How did she get in?"

"She met a large party at Longlands, and made them all think her great fun. They must have taken her up ; she only wanted a start."

Littlemore seemed suddenly to be struck with the grotesqueness of this news, to which his first response was a burst of quick laughter. "To think of Nancy Beck ! The people here are queer people. There's no one they won't go after. They wouldn't touch her in New York."

"Oh, New York's old-fashioned," said Waterville ; and he announced to his friend that Lady Demesne was very eager for his arrival, and wanted to make him help her prevent her son's bringing such a person into the family. Littlemore apparently was not alarmed at her ladyship's projects, and intimated, in the manner of a man who thought them rather impertinent, that he could trust himself to keep out of her way. "It isn't a proper marriage, at any rate," Waterville declared.

"Why not, if he loves her?"

"Oh, if that's all you want !" cried Waterville, with a degree of cynicism that rather surprised his companion.

"Would you marry her yourself?"

"Certainly, if I were in love with her."

“You took care not to be that.”

“Yes, I did—and so Demesne had better have done. But since he’s bitten——!” and Littlemore terminated his sentence in a suppressed yawn.

Waterville presently asked him how he would manage, in view of his sister’s advent, about asking Mrs. Headway to his house; and he replied that he would manage by simply not asking her. Upon this, Waterville declared that he was very inconsistent; to which Littlemore rejoined that it was very possible. But he asked whether they couldn’t talk about something else than Mrs. Headway. He couldn’t enter into the young man’s interest in her, and was sure to have enough of her later.

Waterville would have been sorry to give a false idea of his interest in Mrs. Headway; for he flattered himself the feeling had definite limits. He had been two or three times to see her; but it was a relief to think that she was now quite independent of him. There had been no revival of that intimate intercourse which occurred during the visit to Longlands. She could dispense with assistance now; she knew herself that she was in the current of success. She pretended to be surprised at her good fortune, especially at its rapidity; but she was really surprised at nothing. She took things as they came, and, being essentially a woman of action, wasted almost as little time in elation as she would have done in despondence. She talked a great deal about Lord Edward and Lady Margaret, and about such other members of the nobility as had shown a desire to cultivate her acquaintance; professing to understand perfectly the sources of a popularity which apparently was destined to increase. “They come to laugh at me,” she said; “they come simply to get things to repeat. I can’t open my mouth but they burst into fits. It’s a settled thing that I’m an American humourist; if I say the simplest things, they begin to roar. I must express myself somehow; and indeed when I hold my tongue

they think me funnier than ever. They repeat what I say to a great person, and a great person told some of them the other night that he wanted to hear me for himself. I'll do for him what I do for the others; no better and no worse. I don't know how I do it; I talk the only way I can. They tell me it isn't so much the things I say as the way I say them. Well, they're very easy to please. They don't care for me; it's only to be able to repeat Mrs. Headway's 'last.' Every one wants to have it first; it's a regular race." When she found what was expected of her, she undertook to supply the article in abundance; and the poor little woman really worked hard at her Americanisms. If the taste of London lay that way, she would do her best to gratify it; it was only a pity she hadn't known it before; she would have made more extensive preparations. She thought it a disadvantage, of old, to live in Arizona, in Dakotah, in the newly-admitted States; but now she perceived that, as she phrased it to herself, this was the best thing that ever had happened to her. She tried to remember all the queer stories she had heard out there, and keenly regretted that she had not taken them down in writing; she drummed up the echoes of the Rocky Mountains, and practised the intonations of the Pacific slope. When she saw her audience in convulsions, she said to herself that this was success, and believed that, if she had only come to London five years sooner, she might have married a duke. That would have been even a more absorbing spectacle for the London world than the actual proceedings of Sir Arthur Demesne, who, however, lived sufficiently in the eye of society to justify the rumour that there were bets about town as to the issue of his already protracted courtship. It was food for curiosity to see a young man of his pattern—one of the few "earnest" young men of the Tory side, with an income sufficient for tastes more marked than those by which he was known—make up to a lady several years older than

himself, whose fund of Californian slang was even larger than her stock of dollars. Mrs. Headway had got a good many new ideas since her arrival in London, but she also retained several old ones. The chief of these—it was now a year old—was that Sir Arthur Demesne was the most irreproachable young man in the world. There were, of course, a good many things that he was not. He was not amusing; he was not insinuating; he was not of an absolutely irrepressible ardour. She believed he was constant; but he was certainly not eager. With these things, however, Mrs. Headway could perfectly dispense; she had, in particular, quite outlived the need of being amused. She had had a very exciting life, and her vision of happiness at present was to be magnificently bored. The idea of complete and uncriticised respectability filled her soul with satisfaction; her imagination prostrated itself in the presence of this virtue. She was aware that she had achieved it but ill in her own person; but she could now, at least, connect herself with it by sacred ties. She could prove in that way what was her deepest feeling. This was a religious appreciation of Sir Arthur's great quality—his smooth and rounded, his blooming, lily-like exemption from social flaws.

She was at home when Littlemore went to see her, and surrounded by several visitors, to whom she was giving a late cup of tea, and to whom she introduced her compatriot. He stayed till they dispersed, in spite of the manœuvres of a gentleman who evidently desired to outstay him, but who, whatever might have been his happy fortune on former visits, received on this occasion no encouragement from Mrs. Headway. He looked at Littlemore slowly, beginning with his boots and travelling upwards, as if to discover the reason of so unexpected a preference, and then, without a salutation, left him face to face with their hostess.

“I'm curious to see what you'll do for me, now that you've got your sister with you,” Mrs. Headway presently

remarked, having heard of this circumstance from Rupert Waterville. "I suppose you'll have to do something, you know. I'm sorry for you; but I don't see how you can get off. You might ask me to dine some day when she's dining out. I would come even then, I think, because I want to keep on the right side of you."

"I call that the wrong side," said Littlemore.

"Yes, I see. It's your sister that's on the right side. You're in rather an embarrassing position, ain't you? However, you take those things very quietly. There's something in you that exasperates me. What does your sister think of me? Does she hate me?"

"She knows nothing about you."

"Have you told her nothing?"

"Never a word."

"Hasn't she asked you? That shows that she hates me. She thinks I ain't creditable to America. I know all that. She wants to show people over here that, however they may be taken in by me, she knows much better. But she'll have to ask you about me; she can't go on for ever. Then what'll you say?"

"That you're the most successful woman in Europe."

"Oh, bother!" cried Mrs. Headway, with irritation.

"Haven't you got into European society?"

"Maybe I have, maybe I haven't. It's too soon to see. I can't tell this season. Every one says I've got to wait till next, to see if it's the same. Sometimes they take you up for a few weeks, and then never know you again. You've got to fasten the thing somehow—to drive in a nail."

"You speak as if it were your coffin," said Littlemore.

"Well, it is a kind of coffin. I'm burying my past!"

Littlemore winced at this. He was tired to death of her past. He changed the subject, and made her talk about London, a topic which she treated with a great deal of humour. She entertained him for half an hour,

at the expense of most of her new acquaintances and of some of the most venerable features of the great city. He himself looked at England from the outside, as much as it was possible to do ; but in the midst of her familiar allusions to people and things known to her only since yesterday, he was struck with the fact that she would never really be initiated. She buzzed over the surface of things like a fly on a window-pane. She liked it immensely ; she was flattered, encouraged, excited ; she dropped her confident judgments as if she were scattering flowers, and talked about her intentions, her prospects, her wishes. But she knew no more about English life than about the molecular theory. The words in which he had described her of old to Waterville came back to him : "*Elle ne doute de rien !*" Suddenly she jumped up ; she was going out to dine, and it was time to dress. "Before you leave I want you to promise me something," she said off-hand, but with a look which he had seen before, and which meant that the point was important. "You'll be sure to be questioned about me." And then she paused.

"How do people know I know you ?"

"You haven't bragged about it ? Is that what you mean ? You can be a brute when you try. They do know it, at any rate. Possibly I may have told them. They'll come to you, to ask about me. I mean from Lady Demesne. She's in an awful state—she's so afraid her son'll marry me."

Littlemore was unable to control a laugh. "I'm not, if he hasn't done it yet."

"He can't make up his mind. He likes me so much, yet he thinks I'm not a woman to marry." It was positively grotesque, the detachment with which she spoke of herself.

"He must be a poor creature if he won't marry you as you are," Littlemore said.

This was not a very gallant form of speech ; but Mrs.

Headway let it pass. She only replied, "Well, he wants to be very careful, and so he ought to be!"

"If he asks too many questions he's not worth marrying."

"I beg your pardon—he's worth marrying whatever he does—he's worth marrying for me. And I want to marry him—that's what I want to do."

"Is he waiting for me to settle it?"

"He's waiting for I don't know what—for some one to come and tell him that I'm the sweetest of the sweet. Then he'll believe it. Some one who has been out there and knows all about me. Of course you're the man, you're created on purpose. Don't you remember how I told you in Paris that he wanted to ask you? He was ashamed, and he gave it up; he tried to forget me. But now it's all on again; only, meanwhile, his mother has been at him. She works at him night and day, like a weasel in a hole, to persuade him that I'm far beneath him. He's very fond of her, and he's very open to influence—I mean from his mother, not from any one else. Except me, of course. Oh, I've influenced him, I've explained everything fifty times over. But some things are rather complicated, don't you know; and he keeps coming back to them. He wants every little speck explained. He won't come to you himself, but his mother will, or she'll send some of her people. I guess she'll send the lawyer—the family solicitor, they call him. She wanted to send him out to America to make inquiries, only she didn't know where to send. Of course I couldn't be expected to give the places, they've got to find them out for themselves. She knows all about you, and she has made the acquaintance of your sister. So you see how much I know. She's waiting for you; she means to catch you. She has an idea she can fix you—make you say what'll meet her views. Then she'll lay it before Sir Arthur. So you'll be so good as to deny everything."

Littlemore listened to this little address attentively, but the conclusion left him staring. "You don't mean that anything I can say will make a difference?"

"Don't be affected! You know it will as well as I."

"You make him out a precious idiot."

"Never mind what I make him out. I want to marry him, that's all. And I appeal to you solemnly. You can save me, as you can lose me. If you lose me, you'll be a coward. And if you say a word against me, I shall be lost."

"Go and dress for dinner, that's your salvation," Littlemore answered, separating from her at the head of the stairs.

IX.

It was very well for him to take that tone; but he felt as he walked home that he should scarcely know what to say to people who were determined, as Mrs. Headway put it, to catch him. She had worked a certain spell; she had succeeded in making him feel responsible. The sight of her success, however, rather hardened his heart; he was irritated by her ascending movement. He dined alone that evening, while his sister and her husband, who had engagements every day for a month, partook of their repast at the expense of some friends. Mrs. Dolphin, however, came home rather early, and immediately sought admittance to the small apartment at the foot of the staircase, which was already spoken of as Littlemore's den. Reginald had gone to a "squash" somewhere, and she had returned without delay, having something particular to say to her brother. She was too impatient even to wait till the next morning. She looked impatient; she was very unlike George Littlemore. "I want you to tell me about Mrs. Headway,"

she said, while he started slightly at the coincidence of this remark with his own thoughts. He was just making up his mind at last to speak to her. She unfastened her cloak and tossed it over a chair, then pulled off her long tight black gloves, which were not so fine as those Mrs. Headway wore; all this as if she were preparing herself for an important interview. She was a small neat woman, who had once been pretty, with a small thin voice, a sweet quiet manner, and a perfect knowledge of what it was proper to do on every occasion in life. She always did it, and her conception of it was so definite that failure would have left her without excuse. She was usually not taken for an American, but she made a point of being one, because she flattered herself that she was of a type which, in that nationality, borrowed distinction from its rarity. She was by nature a great conservative, and had ended by being a better Tory than her husband. She was thought by some of her old friends to have changed immensely since her marriage. She knew as much about English society as if she had invented it; had a way, usually, of looking as if she were dressed for a ride; had also thin lips and pretty teeth; and was as positive as she was amiable. She told her brother that Mrs. Headway had given out that he was her most intimate friend, and she thought it rather odd he had never spoken of her. He admitted that he had known her a long time, referred to the circumstances in which the acquaintance had sprung up, and added that he had seen her that afternoon. He sat there smoking his cigar and looking at the ceiling, while Mrs. Dolphin delivered herself of a series of questions. Was it true that he liked her so much, was it true he thought her a possible woman to marry, was it not true that her antecedents had been most peculiar?

"I may as well tell you that I have a letter from Lady Demesne," Mrs. Dolphin said. "It came to me just before I went out, and I have it in my pocket."

She drew forth the missive, which she evidently wished to read to him ; but he gave her no invitation to do so. He knew that she had come to him to extract a declaration adverse to Mrs. Headway's projects, and however little satisfaction he might take in this lady's upward flight, he hated to be urged and pushed. He had a great esteem for Mrs. Dolphin, who, among other Hampshire notions, had picked up that of the preponderance of the male members of a family, so that she treated him with a consideration which made his having an English sister rather a luxury. Nevertheless he was not very encouraging about Mrs. Headway. He admitted once for all that she had not behaved properly—it wasn't worth while to split hairs about that ; but he couldn't see that she was much worse than many other women, and he couldn't get up much feeling about her marrying or not marrying. Moreover, it was none of his business, and he intimated that it was none of Mrs. Dolphin's.

"One surely can't resist the claims of common humanity !" his sister replied ; and she added that he was very inconsistent. He didn't respect Mrs. Headway, he knew the most dreadful things about her, he didn't think her fit company for his own flesh and blood. And yet he was willing to let poor Arthur Demesne be taken in by her !

"Perfectly willing !" Littlemore exclaimed. "All I've got to do is not to marry her myself."

"Don't you think we have any responsibilities, any duties ?"

"I don't know what you mean. If she can succeed, she's welcome. It's a splendid sight in its way."

"How do you mean splendid ?"

"Why, she has run up the tree as if she were a squirrel !"

"It's very true that she has an audacity *à toute épreuve*. But English society has become scandalously easy. I

never saw anything like the people that are taken up. Mrs. Headway has had only to appear to succeed. If they think there's something bad about you they'll be sure to run after you. It's like the decadence of the Roman Empire. You can see to look at Mrs. Headway that she's not a lady. She's pretty, very pretty, but she looks like a dissipated dressmaker. She failed absolutely in New York. I have seen her three times—she apparently goes everywhere. I didn't speak of her—I was wanting to see what you would do. I saw that you meant to do nothing, then this letter decided me. It's written on purpose to be shown to you; it's what she wants you to do. She wrote to me before I came to town, and I went to see her as soon as I arrived. I think it very important. I told her that if she would draw up a little statement I would put it before you as soon as we got settled. She's in real distress. I think you ought to feel for her. You ought to communicate the facts exactly as they stand. A woman has no right to do such things, and come and ask to be accepted. She may make it up with her conscience, but she can't make it up with society. Last night at Lady Dovedale's I was afraid she would know who I was, and come and speak to me. I was so frightened that I went away. If Sir Arthur wishes to marry her for what she is, of course he's welcome. But at least he ought to know."

Mrs. Dolphin was not excited nor voluble; she moved from point to point with a calmness which had all the air of being used to have reason on its side. She deeply desired, however, that Mrs. Headway's triumphant career should be checked; she had sufficiently abused the facilities of things. Herself a party to an international marriage, Mrs. Dolphin naturally wished that the class to which she belonged should close its ranks, and carry its standard high.

"It seems to me that she's quite as good as the little baronet," said Littlemore, lighting another cigar.

"As good? What do you mean? No one has ever breathed a word against him."

"Very likely. But he's a nonentity, and she at least is somebody. She's a person, and a very clever one. Besides, she's quite as good as the women that lots of them have married. I never heard that the British gentry were so unspotted."

"I know nothing about other cases," Mrs. Dolphin said, "I only know about this one. It so happens that I have been brought near to it, and that an appeal has been made to me. The English are very romantic—the most romantic people in the world, if that's what you mean. They do the strangest things, from the force of passion—even those from whom you would least expect it. They marry their cooks—they marry their coachmen—and their romances always have the most miserable end. I'm sure this one would be most wretched. How can you pretend that such a woman as that is to be trusted? What I see is a fine old race—one of the oldest and most honourable in England, people with every tradition of good conduct and high principle—and a dreadful, disreputable, vulgar, little woman, who hasn't an idea of what such things are, trying to force her way into it. I hate to see such things—I want to go to the rescue!"

"I don't—I don't care anything about the fine old race."

"Not from interested motives, of course, any more than I. But surely, on artistic grounds, on grounds of decency?"

"Mrs. Headway isn't indecent—you go too far. You must remember that she's an old friend of mine." Littlemore had become rather stern; Mrs. Dolphin was forgetting the consideration due, from an English point of view, to brothers.

She forgot it even a little more. "Oh, if you are in love with her, too!" she murmured, turning away.

He made no answer to this, and the words had no sting for him. But at last, to finish the affair, he asked what in the world the old lady wanted him to do. Did she want him to go out into Piccadilly, and announce to the passers-by that there was one winter when even Mrs. Headway's sister didn't know who was her husband?

Mrs. Dolphin answered this inquiry by reading out Lady Demesne's letter, which her brother, as she folded it up again, pronounced one of the most extraordinary letters he had ever heard.

"It's very sad—it's a cry of distress," said Mrs. Dolphin. "The whole meaning of it is that she wishes you would come and see her. She doesn't say so in so many words, but I can read between the lines. Besides, she told me she would give anything to see you. Let me assure you it's your duty to go."

"To go and abuse Nancy Beck?"

"Go and praise her, if you like!" This was very clever of Mrs. Dolphin, but her brother was not so easily caught. He didn't take that view of his duty, and he declined to cross her ladyship's threshold. "Then she'll come and see you," said Mrs. Dolphin, with decision.

"If she does, I'll tell her Nancy's an angel."

"If you can say so conscientiously, she'll be delighted to hear it," Mrs. Dolphin replied, as she gathered up her cloak and gloves.

Meeting Rupert Waterville the next day, as he often did, at the St. George's Club, which offers a much-appreciated hospitality to secretaries of legation, and to the natives of the countries they assist in representing, Littlemore let him know that his prophecy had been fulfilled, and that Lady Demesne had been making proposals for an interview. "My sister read me a most remarkable letter from her," he said.

"What sort of a letter?"

"The letter of a woman so scared, that she will do anything. I may be a great brute, but her fright amuses me."

"You're in the position of Olivier de Jalin, in the *Demi-Monde*," Waterville remarked.

"In the *Demi-Monde*?" Littlemore was not quick at catching literary allusions.

"Don't you remember the play we saw in Paris? Or like Don Fabrice in *L'Aventurière*. A bad woman tries to marry an honourable man, who doesn't know how bad she is, and they who do know step in and push her back."

"Yes, I remember. There was a good deal of lying, all round."

"They prevented the marriage, however, which is the great thing."

"The great thing, if you care about it. One of them was the intimate friend of the fellow, the other was his son. Demesne's nothing to me."

"He's a very good fellow," said Waterville.

"Go and tell him, then."

"Play the part of Olivier de Jalin? Oh, I can't. I'm not Olivier. But I wish he would come along. Mrs. Headway oughtn't really to be allowed to pass."

"I wish to heaven they'd let me alone," Littlemore murmured, ruefully, staring for a while out of the window.

"Do you still hold to that theory you propounded in Paris? Are you willing to commit perjury?" Waterville asked.

"Of course I can refuse to answer questions—even that one."

"As I told you before, that will amount to a condemnation."

"It may amount to what it pleases. I think I will go to Paris."

"That will be the same as not answering. But it's quite the best thing you can do. I have been thinking a great deal about it, and it seems to me, from the social point of view, that, as I say, she really oughtn't to pass."

Waterville had the air of looking at the thing from a great elevation; his tone, the expression of his face, indicated this lofty flight; the effect of which, as he glanced down at his didactic young friend, Littlemore found peculiarly irritating.

"No, after all, hanged if they shall drive me away!" he exclaimed abruptly; and walked off, while his companion looked after him.

X.

THE morning after this Littlemore received a note from Mrs. Headway—a short and simple note, consisting merely of the words, "I shall be at home this afternoon; will you come and see me at five? I have something particular to say to you." He sent no answer to this inquiry, but he went to the little house in Chesterfield Street at the hour that its mistress had designated.

"I don't believe you know what sort of woman I am!" she exclaimed, as soon as he stood before her.

"Oh, Lord!" Littlemore groaned, dropping into a chair. Then he added, "Don't begin on that sort of thing!"

"I shall begin—that's what I wanted to say. It's very important. You don't know me—you don't understand me. You think you do—but you don't."

"It isn't for the want of your having told me—many, many times!" And Littlemore smiled, though he was bored at the prospect that opened before him. The last word of all was, decidedly, that Mrs. Headway was a nuisance. She didn't deserve to be spared!

She glared at him a little at this; her face was no longer the face that smiled. She looked sharp and violent, almost old; the change was complete. But she

gave a little angry laugh. "Yes, I know ; men are so stupid. They know nothing about women but what women tell them. And women tell them things on purpose, to see how stupid they can be. I've told you things like that, just for amusement, when it was dull. If you believed them, it was your own fault. But now I am serious, I want you really to know."

"I don't want to know. I know enough."

"How do you mean, you know enough?" she cried, with a flushed face. "What business have you to know anything?" The poor little woman, in her passionate purpose, was not obliged to be consistent, and the loud laugh with which Littlemore greeted this interrogation must have seemed to her unduly harsh. "You shall know what I want you to know, however. You think me a bad woman—you don't respect me ; I told you that in Paris. I have done things I don't understand, myself, to-day ; that I admit, as fully as you please. But I've completely changed, and I want to change everything. You ought to enter into that ; you ought to see what I want. I hate everything that has happened to me before this ; I loathe it, I despise it. I went on that way, trying—one thing and another. But now I've got what I want. Do you expect me to go down on my knees to you? I believe I will, I'm so anxious. You can help me—no one else can do a thing—no one can do anything—they are only waiting to see if he'll do it. I told you in Paris you could help me, and it's just as true now. Say a good word for me, for God's sake ! You haven't lifted your little finger, or I should know it by this time. It will just make the difference. Or if your sister would come and see me, I should be all right. Women are pitiless, pitiless, and you are pitiless too. It isn't that she's anything so great, most of my friends are better than that !—but she's the one woman who *knows*, and people know that she knows. *He* knows that she knows, and he knows she

doesn't come. So she kills me—she kills me! I understand perfectly what he wants—I shall do everything, be anything, I shall be the most perfect wife. The old woman will adore me when she knows me—it's too stupid of her not to see. Everything in the past is over; it has all fallen away from me; it's the life of another woman. This was what I wanted; I knew I should find it some day. What could I do in those horrible places? I had to take what I could. But now I've got a nice country. I want you to do me justice; you have never done me justice; that's what I sent for you for."

Littlemore suddenly ceased to be bored; but a variety of feelings had taken the place of a single one. It was impossible not to be touched; she really meant what she said. People don't change their nature; but they change their desires, their ideal, their effort. This incoherent and passionate protestation was an assurance that she was literally panting to be respectable. But the poor woman, whatever she did, was condemned, as Littlemore had said of old, in Paris, to Waterville, to be only half right. The colour rose to her visitor's face as he listened to this outpouring of anxiety and egotism; she had not managed her early life very well, but there was no need of her going down on her knees. "It's very painful to me to hear all this," he said. "You are under no obligation to say such things to me. You entirely misconceive my attitude—my influence."

"Oh yes, you shirk it—you only wish to shirk it!" she cried, flinging away fiercely the sofa-cushion on which she had been resting.

"Marry whom you please!" Littlemore almost shouted, springing to his feet.

He had hardly spoken when the door was thrown open, and the servant announced Sir Arthur Demesne. The baronet entered with a certain briskness, but he stopped short on seeing that Mrs. Headway had another

visitor. Recognising Littlemore, however, he gave a slight exclamation, which might have passed for a greeting. Mrs. Headway, who had risen as he came in, looked with extraordinary earnestness from one of the men to the other ; then, like a person who had a sudden inspiration, she clasped her hands together and cried out, "I'm so glad you've met ; if I had arranged it, it couldn't be better !"

"If you had arranged it?" said Sir Arthur, crinkling a little his high white forehead, while the conviction rose before Littlemore that she had indeed arranged it.

"I'm going to do something very strange," she went on, and her eye glittered with a light that confirmed her words.

"You're excited, I'm afraid you're ill." Sir Arthur stood there with his hat and his stick ; he was evidently much annoyed.

"It's an excellent opportunity ; you must forgive me if I take advantage." And she flashed a tender, touching ray at the baronet. "I have wanted this a long time—perhaps you have seen I wanted it. Mr. Littlemore has known me a long, long time ; he's an old, old friend. I told you that in Paris, don't you remember ? Well, he's my only one, and I want him to speak for me." Her eyes had turned now to Littlemore ; they rested upon him with a sweetness that only made the whole proceeding more audacious. She had begun to smile again, though she was visibly trembling. "He's my only one," she continued ; "it's a great pity, you ought to have known others. But I'm very much alone, I must make the best of what I have. I want so much that some one else than myself should speak for me. Women usually can ask that service of a relative, or of another woman. I can't ; it's a great pity, but it's not my fault, it's my misfortune. None of my people are here ; and I'm terribly alone in the world. But Mr. Littlemore will tell you ; he will say he has known me

for years. He will tell you whether he knows any reason—whether he knows anything against me. He’s been wanting the chance ; but he thought he couldn’t begin himself. You see I treat you as an old friend, dear Mr. Littlemore. I will leave you with Sir Arthur. You will both excuse me.” The expression of her face, turned towards Littlemore, as she delivered herself of this singular proposal, had the intentness of a magician who wishes to work a spell. She gave Sir Arthur another smile, and then she swept out of the room.

The two men remained in the extraordinary position that she had created for them ; neither of them moved even to open the door for her. She closed it behind her, and for a moment there was a deep, portentous silence. Sir Arthur Desmesne, who was very pale, stared hard at the carpet.

“I am placed in an impossible situation,” Littlemore said at last, “and I don’t imagine that you accept it any more than I do.”

The baronet kept the same attitude ; he neither looked up nor answered. Littlemore felt a sudden gush of pity for him. Of course he couldn’t accept the situation ; but all the same, he was half sick with anxiety to see how this nondescript American, who was both so valuable and so superfluous, so familiar and so inscrutable, would consider Mrs. Headway’s challenge.

“Have you any question to ask me?” Littlemore went on.

At this Sir Arthur looked up. Littlemore had seen the look before ; he had described it to Waterville after the baronet came to call on him in Paris. There were other things mingled with it now—shame, annoyance, pride ; but the great thing, the intense desire to *know*, was paramount.

“Good God, how can I tell him?” Littlemore exclaimed to himself.

Sir Arthur’s hesitation was probably extremely brief ;

but Littlemore heard the ticking of the clock while it lasted. "Certainly, I have no question to ask," the young man said in a voice of cool, almost insolent surprise.

"Good-day, then."

"Good-day."

And Littlemore left Sir Arthur in possession. He expected to find Mrs. Headway at the foot of the staircase ; but he quitted the house without interruption.

On the morrow, after lunch, as he was leaving the little mansion at Queen Anne's Gate, the postman handed him a letter. Littlemore opened and read it on the steps of his house, an operation which took but a moment. It ran as follows :—

"DEAR MR. LITTLEMORE—It will interest you to know that I am engaged to be married to Sir Arthur Demesne, and that our marriage is to take place as soon as their stupid old Parliament rises. But it's not to come out for some days, and I am sure that I can trust meanwhile to your complete discretion.

"Yours very sincerely,

"NANCY H.

"P.S.—He made me a terrible scene for what I did yesterday, but he came back in the evening and made it up. That's how the thing comes to be settled. He won't tell me what passed between you—he requested me never to allude to the subject. I don't care ; I was bound you should speak !"

Littlemore thrust this epistle into his pocket and marched away with it. He had come out to do various things, but he forgot his business for the time, and before he knew it had walked into Hyde Park. He left the carriages and riders to one side of him, and followed the Serpentine into Kensington Gardens, of which he made the complete circuit. He felt annoyed, and more

disappointed than he understood—than he would have understood if he had tried. Now that Nancy Beck had succeeded, her success seemed offensive, and he was almost sorry he had not said to Sir Arthur—"Oh, well, she was pretty bad, you know." However, now the thing was settled, at least they would leave him alone. He walked off his irritation, and before he went about the business he had come out for, had ceased to think about Mrs. Headway. He went home at six o'clock, and the servant who admitted him informed him in doing so that Mrs. Dolphin had requested he should be told on his return that she wished to see him in the drawing-room. "It's another trap!" he said to himself, instinctively; but, in spite of this reflection, he went upstairs. On entering the apartment in which Mrs. Dolphin was accustomed to sit, he found that she had a visitor. This visitor, who was apparently on the point of departing, was a tall, elderly woman, and the two ladies stood together in the middle of the room.

"I'm so glad you've come back," said Mrs. Dolphin, without meeting her brother's eye. "I want so much to introduce you to Lady Demesne, and I hoped you would come in. Must you really go—won't you stay a little?" she added, turning to her companion; and without waiting for an answer, went on hastily—"I must leave you a moment—excuse me. I will come back!" Before he knew it, Littlemore found himself alone with Lady Demesne, and he understood that, since he had not been willing to go and see her, she had taken upon herself to make an advance. It had the queerest effect, all the same, to see his sister playing the same tricks as Nancy Beck!

"Ah, she must be in a fidget!" he said to himself as he stood before Lady Demesne. She looked delicate and modest, even timid, as far as a tall, serene woman who carried her head very well could look so; and she was such a different type from Mrs. Headway that his

present vision of Nancy's triumph gave her by contrast something of the dignity of the vanquished. It made him feel sorry for her. She lost no time; she went straight to the point. She evidently felt that in the situation in which she had placed herself, her only advantage could consist in being simple and business-like.

"I'm so glad to see you for a moment. I wish so much to ask you if you can give me any information about a person you know, and about whom I have been in correspondence with Mrs. Dolphin. I mean Mrs. Headway."

"Won't you sit down?" asked Littlemore.

"No, I thank you. I have only a moment."

"May I ask you why you make this inquiry?"

"Of course I must give you my reason. I am afraid my son will marry her."

Littlemore was puzzled for a moment; then he felt sure that she was not yet aware of the fact imparted to him in Mrs. Headway's note. "You don't like her?" he said, exaggerating in spite of himself the interrogative inflexion.

"Not at all," said Lady Demesne, smiling and looking at him. Her smile was gentle, without rancour; Littlemore thought it almost beautiful.

"What would you like me to say?" he asked.

"Whether you think her respectable."

"What good will that do you? How can it possibly affect the event?"

"It will do me no good, of course, if your opinion is favourable. But if you tell me it is not, I shall be able to say to my son that the one person in London who has known her more than six months thinks her a bad woman."

This epithet, on Lady Demesne's clear lips, evoked no protest from Littlemore. He had suddenly become conscious of the need to utter the simple truth with which

he had answered Rupert Waterville's first question at the Théâtre Français. "I don't think Mrs. Headway respectable," he said.

"I was sure you would say that." Lady Demesne seemed to pant a little.

"I can say nothing more—not a word. That's my opinion. I don't think it will help you."

"I think it will. I wished to have it from your own lips. That makes all the difference," said Lady Demesne. "I am exceedingly obliged to you." And she offered him her hand; after which he accompanied her in silence to the door.

He felt no discomfort, no remorse, at what he had said; he only felt relief. Perhaps it was because he believed it would make no difference. It made a difference only in what was at the bottom of all things—his own sense of fitness. He only wished he had remarked to Lady Demesne that Mrs. Headway would probably make her son a capital wife. But that, at least, would make no difference. He requested his sister, who had wondered greatly at the brevity of his interview with Lady Demesne, to spare him all questions on this subject; and Mrs. Dolphin went about for some days in the happy faith that there were to be no dreadful Americans in English society compromising her native land.

Her faith, however, was short-lived. Nothing had made any difference; it was, perhaps, too late. The London world heard in the first days of July, not that Sir Arthur Demesne was to marry Mrs. Headway, but that the pair had been privately, and it was to be hoped, as regards Mrs. Headway, on this occasion indissolubly, united. Lady Demesne gave neither sign nor sound; she only retired to the country.

"I think you might have done differently," said Mrs. Dolphin, very pale, to her brother. "But of course everything will come out now."

“Yes, and make her more the fashion than ever!” Littlemore answered, with cynical laughter. After his little interview with the elder Lady Demesne he did not feel himself at liberty to call again upon the younger; and he never learned—he never even wished to know—whether in the pride of her success she forgave him.

Waterville—it was very strange—was positively scandalised at this success. He held that Mrs. Headway ought never to have been allowed to marry a confiding gentleman; and he used, in speaking to Littlemore, the same words as Mrs. Dolphin. He thought Littlemore might have done differently.

He spoke with such vehemence that Littlemore looked at him hard—hard enough to make him blush.

“Did you want to marry her yourself?” his friend inquired. “My dear fellow, you’re in love with her! That’s what’s the matter with you.”

This, however, blushing still more, Waterville indignantly denied. A little later he heard from New York that people were beginning to ask who in the world was Mrs. Headway.

MADAME DE MAUVES

MADAME DE MAUVES.

I.

THE view from the terrace at Saint-Germain-en-Laye is immense and famous. Paris lies spread before you in dusky vastness, domed and fortified, glittering here and there through her light vapours, and girdled with her silver Seine. Behind you is a park of stately symmetry, and behind that a forest, where you may lounge through turfy avenues and light-checked glades, and quite forget that you are within half an hour of the boulevards. One afternoon, however, in mid-spring, some five years ago, a young man seated on the terrace had chosen not to forget this. His eyes were fixed in idle wistfulness on the mighty human hive before him. He was fond of rural things, and he had come to Saint-Germain a week before to meet the spring half-way ; but though he could boast of a six months' acquaintance with the great city, he never looked at it from his present standpoint without a feeling of painfully unsatisfied curiosity. There were moments when it seemed to him that not to be there just then was to miss some thrilling chapter of experience. And yet his winter's experience had been rather fruitless, and he had closed the book almost with a yawn. Though not in the least a cynic, he was what one may call a dis-

appointed observer ; and he never chose the right-hand road without beginning to suspect after an hour's wayfaring that the left would have been the interesting one. He now had a dozen minds to go to Paris for the evening, to dine at the Café Brébant and to repair afterwards to the Gymnase and listen to the latest exposition of the duties of the injured husband. He would probably have risen to execute this project, if he had not observed a little girl who, wandering along the terrace, had suddenly stopped short and begun to gaze at him with round-eyed frankness. For a moment he was simply amused, for the child's face denoted helpless wonderment ; the next he was agreeably surprised. "Why, this is my friend Maggie," he said ; "I see you have not forgotten me."

Maggie, after a short parley, was induced to seal her remembrance with a kiss. Invited then to explain her appearance at Saint-Germain, she embarked on a recital in which the general, according to the infantine method, was so fatally sacrificed to the particular, that Longmore looked about him for a superior source of information. He found it in Maggie's mamma, who was seated with another lady at the opposite end of the terrace ; so, taking the child by the hand, he led her back to her companions.

Maggie's mamma was a young American lady, as you would immediately have perceived, with a pretty and friendly face, and an expensive spring toilet. She greeted Longmore with surprised cordiality, mentioned his name to her friend, and bade him bring a chair and sit with them. The other lady, who, though equally young and perhaps even prettier, was dressed more soberly, remained silent, stroking the hair of the little girl, whom she had drawn against her knee. She had never heard of Longmore, but she now perceived that her companion had crossed the ocean with him, had met him afterwards in travelling, and (having left her husband in Wall Street) was indebted to him for various small services.

Maggie's mamma turned from time to time and smiled

at her friend with an air of invitation ; the latter smiled back, and continued gracefully to say nothing.

For ten minutes Longmore felt a revival of interest in his interlocutress ; then (as riddles are more amusing than commonplaces) it gave way to curiosity about her friend. His eyes wandered ; her volubility was less suggestive than the latter's silence.

The stranger was perhaps not obviously a beauty nor obviously an American ; but she was essentially both, on a closer scrutiny. She was slight and fair, and, though naturally pale, she was delicately flushed, apparently with recent excitement. What chiefly struck Longmore in her face was the union of a pair of beautifully gentle, almost languid gray eyes, with a mouth peculiarly expressive and firm. Her forehead was a trifle more expansive than belongs to classic types, and her thick brown hair was dressed out of the fashion, which was just then very ugly. Her throat and bust were slender, but all the more in harmony with certain rapid, charming movements of the head, which she had a way of throwing back every now and then, with an air of attention and a sidelong glance from her dove-like eyes. She seemed at once alert and indifferent, contemplative and restless ; and Longmore very soon discovered that if she was not a brilliant beauty, she was at least an extremely interesting one. This very impression made him magnanimous. He perceived that he had interrupted a confidential conversation, and he judged it discreet to withdraw, having first learned from Maggie's mamma—Mrs. Draper—that she was to take the six o'clock train back to Paris. He promised to meet her at the station.

He kept his appointment, and Mrs. Draper arrived betimes, accompanied by her friend. The latter, however, made her farewells at the door and drove away again, giving Longmore time only to raise his hat. "Who is she?" he asked with visible ardour, as he brought Mrs. Draper her tickets.

"Come and see me to-morrow at the Hôtel de l'Empire," she answered, "and I will tell you all about her." The force of this offer in making him punctual at the Hôtel de l'Empire Longmore doubtless never exactly measured ; and it was perhaps well that he did not, for he found his friend, who was on the point of leaving Paris, so distracted by procrastinating milliners and perjured lingères that she had no wits left for disinterested narrative. "You must find Saint-Germain dreadfully dull," she said, as he was going. "Why won't you come with me to London?"

"Introduce me to Madame de Mauves," he answered, "and Saint-Germain will satisfy me." All he had learned was the lady's name and residence.

"Ah ! she, poor woman, will not make Saint-Germain cheerful for you. She's very unhappy."

Longmore's further inquiries were arrested by the arrival of a young lady with a bandbox ; but he went away with the promise of a note of introduction, to be immediately despatched to him at Saint-Germain.

He waited a week, but the note never came ; and he declared that it was not for Mrs. Draper to complain of her milliner's treachery. He lounged on the terrace and walked in the forest, studied suburban street life, and made a languid attempt to investigate the records of the court of the exiled Stuarts ; but he spent most of his time in wondering where Madame de Mauves lived, and whether she ever walked on the terrace. Sometimes, he finally discovered ; for one afternoon towards dusk he perceived her leaning against the parapet, alone. In his momentary hesitation to approach her, it seemed to him that there was almost a shade of trepidation ; but his curiosity was not diminished by the consciousness of this result of a quarter of an hour's acquaintance. She immediately recognised him, on his drawing near, with the manner of a person unaccustomed to encounter an embarrassing variety of faces. Her dress, her expression,

were the same as before ; her charm was there, like that of sweet music on a second hearing. She soon made conversation easy by asking him for news of Mrs. Draper. Longmore told her that he was daily expecting news, and, after a pause, mentioned the promised note of introduction.

"It seems less necessary now," he said—"for me, at least. But for you—I should have liked you to know the flattering things Mrs. Draper would probably have said about me."

"If it arrives at last," she answered, "you must come and see me and bring it. If it doesn't, you must come without it."

Then, as she continued to linger in spite of the thickening twilight, she explained that she was waiting for her husband, who was to arrive in the train from Paris, and who often passed along the terrace on his way home. Longmore well remembered that Mrs. Draper had pronounced her unhappy, and he found it convenient to suppose that this same husband made her so. Edified by his six months in Paris—"What else is possible," he asked himself, "for a sweet American girl who marries an unclean Frenchman?"

But this tender expectancy of her lord's return undermined his hypothesis, and it received a further check from the gentle eagerness with which she turned and greeted an approaching figure. Longmore beheld in the fading light a stoutish gentleman, on the fair side of forty, in a high light hat, whose countenance, indistinct against the sky, was adorned by a fantastically pointed moustache. M. de Mauves saluted his wife with punctilious gallantry, and having bowed to Longmore, asked her several questions in French. Before taking his proffered arm to walk to their carriage, which was in waiting at the gate of the terrace, she introduced our hero as a friend of Mrs. Draper, and a fellow-countryman, whom she hoped to see at home. M. de Mauves re-

sponded briefly, but civilly, in very fair English, and led his wife away.

Longmore watched him as he went, twisting his picturesque moustache, with a feeling of irritation which he certainly would have been at a loss to account for. The only conceivable cause was the light which M. de Mauves's good English cast upon his own bad French. For reasons involved apparently in the very structure of his being, Longmore found himself unable to speak the language tolerably. He admired and enjoyed it, but the very genius of awkwardness controlled his phraseology. But he reflected with satisfaction that Madame de Mauves and he had a common idiom, and his vexation was effectually dispelled by his finding on his table that evening a letter from Mrs. Draper. It enclosed a short, formal missive to Madame de Mauves, but the epistle itself was copious and confidential. She had deferred writing till she reached London, where for a week, of course, she had found other amusements.

"I think it is the sight of so many women here who don't look at all like her, that has reminded me by the law of contraries of my charming friend at Saint-Germain and my promise to introduce you to her," she wrote. "I believe I told you that she was unhappy, and I wondered afterwards whether I had not been guilty of a breach of confidence. But you would have found it out for yourself, and besides, she told me no secrets. She declared she was the happiest creature in the world, and then, poor thing, she burst into tears, and I prayed to be delivered from such happiness. It's the miserable story of an American girl, born to be neither a slave nor a toy, marrying a profligate Frenchman, who believes that a woman must be one or the other. The silliest American woman is too good for the best foreigner, and the poorest of us have moral needs that the cleverest Frenchman is quite unable to appreciate. She was romantic and perverse—she thought Americans were

vulgar. Matrimonial felicity perhaps *is* vulgar; but I think now-a-days she wishes she were a little less elegant. M. de Mauves cared, of course, for nothing but her money, which he is spending royally on his *menus plaisirs*. I hope you appreciate the compliment I pay you when I recommend you to go and console an unhappy wife. I have never given a man such a proof of esteem, and if you were to disappoint me I should renounce the world. Prove to Madame de Mauves that an American friend may mingle admiration and respect better than a French husband. She avoids society, and lives quite alone, seeing no one but a horrible French sister-in-law. Do let me hear that you have drawn some of the sadness from that desperate smile of hers. Make her smile with a good conscience."

These zealous admonitions left Longmore slightly disturbed. He found himself on the edge of a domestic tragedy from which he instinctively recoiled. To call upon Madame de Mauves with his present knowledge seemed a sort of fishing in troubled waters. He was a modest man, and yet he asked himself whether the effect of his attentions might not be to add to her discomfort. A flattering sense of unwonted opportunity, however, made him, with the lapse of time, more confident—possibly more reckless. It seemed a very inspiring idea to draw the sadness from his fair countrywoman's smile, and at least he hoped to persuade her that there was such a thing as an agreeable American. He immediately called upon her.

II.

SHE had been placed for her education, fourteen years before, in a Parisian convent, by a widowed mamma who was fonder of Homburg and Nice than of letting out tucks

in the frocks of a vigorously growing daughter. Here, besides various elegant accomplishments—the art of wearing a train, of composing a bouquet, of presenting a cup of tea—she acquired a certain turn of the imagination which might have passed for a sign of precocious worldliness. She dreamed of marrying a title—not for the pleasure of hearing herself called Madame la Vicomtesse (for which it seemed to her that she should never greatly care), but because she had a romantic belief that the best birth is the guarantee of an ideal delicacy of feeling. Romances are rarely constructed in such perfect good faith, and Euphemia's excuse was the primitive purity of her imagination. She was essentially incorruptible, and she cherished this pernicious conceit as if it had been a dogma revealed by a white-winged angel. Even after experience had given her a hundred rude hints, she found it easier to believe in fables, when they had a certain nobleness of meaning, than in well-attested but sordid facts. She believed that a gentleman with a long pedigree must be of necessity a very fine fellow, and that the consciousness of a picturesque family tradition imparts an exquisite tone to the character. *Noblesse oblige*, she thought, as regards yourself, and insures, as regards your wife. She had never spoken to a nobleman in her life, and these convictions were but a matter of transcendent theory. They were the fruit, in part, of the perusal of various Ultramontane works of fiction—the only ones admitted to the convent library—in which the hero was always a Legitimist vicomte who fought duels by the dozen, but went twice a month to confession; and in part of the perfumed gossip of her companions, many of them *filles de haut lieu*, who in the convent garden, after Sundays at home, depicted their brothers and cousins as Prince Charmings and young Paladins. Euphemia listened and said nothing; she shrouded her visions of matrimony under a coronet in religious mystery. She was not of that type of young lady who is easily induced

to declare that her husband must be six feet high and a little near-sighted, part his hair in the middle, and have amber lights in his beard. To her companions she seemed to have a very pallid fancy; and even the fact that she was a sprig of the transatlantic democracy never sufficiently explained her apathy on social questions. She had a mental image of that son of the Crusaders who was to suffer her to adore him, but like many an artist who has produced a masterpiece of idealisation, she shrank from exposing it to public criticism. It was the portrait of a gentleman rather ugly than handsome, and rather poor than rich. But his ugliness was to be nobly expressive, and his poverty delicately proud.

Euphemia had a fortune of her own, which, at the proper time, after fixing on her in eloquent silence those fine eyes which were to soften the feudal severity of his visage, he was to accept with a world of stifled protestations. One condition alone she was to make—that his blood should be of the very finest strain. On this she would stake her happiness.

It so chanced that circumstances were to give convincing colour to this primitive logic.

Though little of a talker, Euphemia was an ardent listener, and there were moments when she fairly hung upon the lips of Mademoiselle Marie de Mauves. Her intimacy with this chosen schoolmate was, like most intimacies, based on their points of difference. Mademoiselle de Mauves was very positive, very shrewd, very ironical, very French—everything that Euphemia felt herself unpardonable in not being. During her Sundays *en ville* she had examined the world and judged it, and she imparted her impressions to our attentive heroine with an agreeable mixture of enthusiasm and scepticism. She was, moreover, a handsome and well-grown person, on whom Euphemia's ribbons and trinkets had a trick of looking better than on their slender proprietress. She had, finally, the supreme merit of being a rigorous ex-

ample of the virtue of exalted birth, having, as she did, ancestors honourably mentioned by Joinville and Commines, and a stately grandmother with a hooked nose, who came up with her after the holidays from a veritable *castel* in Auvergne. It seemed to Euphemia that these attributes made her friend more at home in the world than if she had been the daughter of even the most prosperous grocer. A certain aristocratic impudence Mademoiselle de Mauves abundantly possessed, and her raids among her friend's finery were quite in the spirit of her baronial ancestors in the twelfth century—a spirit which Euphemia considered but a large way of understanding friendship—a freedom from small deference to the world's opinions which would sooner or later justify itself in acts of surprising magnanimity. Mademoiselle de Mauves herself perhaps was but partially conscious of that sweet security which Euphemia envied her. She proved herself later in life such an accomplished schemer that her sense of having further heights to scale must have awakened early. Our heroine's ribbons and trinkets had much to do with the other's sisterly patronage, and her appealing pliancy of character even more; but the concluding motive of Marie's writing to her grandmamma to invite Euphemia for a three weeks' holiday to the *castel* in Auvergne involved altogether superior considerations. Mademoiselle de Mauves was indeed at this time seventeen years of age, and presumably capable of general views; and Euphemia, who was hardly less, was a very well-grown subject for experiment, besides being pretty enough almost to pre-assure success. It is a proof of the sincerity of Euphemia's aspirations that the *castel* was not a shock to her faith. It was neither a cheerful nor a luxurious abode, but the young girl found it as delightful as a play. It had battered towers and an empty moat, a rusty drawbridge and a court paved with crooked grass-grown slabs, over which the antique coach wheels of the old lady with the hooked nose seemed to awaken

the echoes of the seventeenth century. Euphemia was not frightened out of her dream ; she had the pleasure of seeing it assume the consistency of a flattering presentiment. She had a taste for old servants, old anecdotes, old furniture, faded household colours, and sweetly stale odours—musty treasures in which the Château de Mauves abounded. She made a dozen sketches in water-colours, after her conventual pattern ; but sentimentally, as one may say, she was for ever sketching with a freer hand.

Old Madame de Mauves had nothing severe but her nose, and she seemed to Euphemia, as indeed she was, a graciously venerable relic of an historic order of things. She took a great fancy to the young American, who was ready to sit all day at her feet and listen to anecdotes of the *bon temps* and quotations from the family chronicles. Madame de Mauves was a very honest old woman, and uttered her thoughts with antique plainness. One day, after pushing back Euphemia's shining locks and blinking at her with some tenderness from under her spectacles, she declared with an energetic shake of the head that she didn't know what to make of her. And in answer to the young girl's startled blush—"I should like to advise you," she said, "but you seem to me so all of a piece that I am afraid that if I advise you I shall spoil you. It's easy to see that you are not one of us. I don't know whether you are better, but you seem to me to listen to the murmur of your own young spirit rather than to the voice from behind the confessional or to the whisper of opportunity. Young girls, in my day, when they were stupid, were very docile, but when they were clever, were very sly. You are clever enough, I imagine, and yet if I guessed all your secrets at this moment, is there one I should have to frown at? I can tell you a wickeder one than any you have discovered for yourself. If you expect to live in France, and you wish to be happy, don't listen too hard to that little voice I just

spoke of—the voice that is neither the curé's nor the world's. You will fancy it saying things that it won't help your case to hear. They will make you sad, and when you are sad you will grow plain, and when you are plain you will grow bitter, and when you are bitter you will be very disagreeable. I was brought up to think that a woman's first duty is to please, and the happiest women I have known have been the ones who performed this duty faithfully. As you are not a Catholic, I suppose you can't be a *dévoté*; and if you don't take life as a fifty years' mass, the only way to take it is as a game of skill. Listen to this. Not to lose at the game of life, you must—I don't say cheat, but not be too sure your neighbour won't, and not be shocked out of your self-possession if he does. Don't lose, my dear; I beseech you, don't lose. Be neither suspicious nor credulous, and if you find your neighbour peeping, don't cry out, but very politely wait your own chance. I have had my *revanche* more than once in my day, but I really think that the sweetest I could take against life as a whole would be to have your blessed innocence profit by my experience."

This was rather bewildering advice, but Euphemia understood it too little to be either edified or frightened. She sat listening to it very much as she would have listened to the speeches of an old lady in a comedy, whose diction should picturesquely correspond to the pattern of her mantilla and the fashion of her head-dress. Her indifference was doubly dangerous, for Madame de Mauves spoke at the prompting of coming events, and her words were the result of a somewhat troubled conscience—a conscience which told her at once that Euphemia was too tender a victim to be sacrificed to an ambition, and that the prosperity of her house was too precious a heritage to be sacrificed to a scruple. The prosperity in question had suffered repeated and grievous breaches, and the house of De Mauves had been pervaded

by the cold comfort of an establishment in which people were obliged to balance dinner-table allusions to feudal ancestors against the absence of side-dishes ; a state of things the more regrettable as the family was now mainly represented by a gentleman whose appetite was large, and who justly maintained that its historic glories had not been established by underfed heroes.

Three days after Euphemia's arrival Richard de Mauves came down from Paris to pay his respects to his grandmother, and treated our heroine to her first encounter with a gentilhomme in the flesh. On coming in he kissed his grandmother's hand, with a smile which caused her to draw it away with dignity, and set Euphemia, who was standing by, wondering what had happened between them. Her unanswered wonder was but the beginning of a life of bitter perplexity, but the reader is free to know that the smile of M. de Mauves was a reply to a certain postscript affixed by the old lady to a letter promptly addressed to him by her granddaughter, after Euphemia had been admitted to justify the latter's promises. Mademoiselle de Mauves brought her letter to her grandmother for approval, but obtained no more than was expressed in a frigid nod. The old lady watched her with a sombre glance as she proceeded to seal the letter, and suddenly bade her open it again and bring her a pen.

"Your sister's flatteries are all nonsense," she wrote ; "the young lady is far too good for you, *mauvais sujet*. If you have a particle of conscience you will not come and disturb the repose of an angel of innocence."

The young girl, who had read these lines, made up a little face as she re-directed the letter ; but she laid down her pen with a confident nod which might have seemed to mean that, to the best of her belief, her brother had not a conscience.

"If you meant what you said," the young man whispered to his grandmother on the first opportunity,

“it would have been simpler not to let her send the letter!”

It was perhaps because she was wounded by this cynical insinuation that Madame de Mauves remained in her own apartment during a greater part of Euphemia's stay, so that the latter's angelic innocence was left entirely to the Baron's mercy. It suffered no worse mischance, however, than to be prompted to intenser communion with itself. M. de Mauves was the hero of the young girl's romance made real, and so completely accordant with this creature of her imagination, that she felt afraid of him, very much as she would have been of a supernatural apparition. He was now thirty-five— young enough to suggest possibilities of ardent activity, and old enough to have formed opinions which a simple woman might deem it an intellectual privilege to listen to. He was perhaps a trifle handsomer than Euphemia's rather grim, Quixotic ideal, but a very few days reconciled her to his good looks, as effectually they would have reconciled her to his ugliness. He was quiet, grave, eminently distinguished. He spoke little, but his speeches, without being sententious, had a certain nobleness of tone which caused them to re-echo in the young girl's ears at the end of the day. He paid her very little direct attention, but his chance words—if he only asked her if she objected to his cigarette—were accompanied by a smile of extraordinary kindness.

It happened that shortly after his arrival, riding an unruly horse which Euphemia with shy admiration had watched him mount in the castle yard, he was thrown with a violence which, without disparaging his skill, made him for a fortnight an interesting invalid, lounging in the library with a bandaged knee. To beguile his confinement Euphemia was repeatedly induced to sing to him, which she did with a little natural tremor in her voice which might have passed for an exquisite refinement of art. He never overwhelmed her with compliments,

but he listened with unwandering attention, remembered all her melodies, and sat humming them to himself. While his imprisonment lasted, indeed, he passed hours in her company, and made her feel not unlike some unfriended artist who has suddenly gained the opportunity to devote a fortnight to the study of a great model. Euphemia studied with noiseless diligence what she supposed to be the "character" of M. de Mauves, and the more she looked the more fine lights and shades she seemed to behold in this masterpiece of nature. M. de Mauves's character, indeed, whether from a sense of being generously scrutinised, or for reasons which bid graceful defiance to analysis, had never been so amiable; it seemed really to reflect the purity of Euphemia's interpretation of it. There had been nothing especially to admire in the state of mind in which he left Paris—a hard determination to marry a young girl whose charms might or might not justify his sister's account of them, but who was mistress, at the worst, of a couple of hundred thousand francs a year. He had not counted out sentiment; if she pleased him, so much the better; but he had left a meagre margin for it, and he would hardly have admitted that so excellent a match could be improved by it. He was a placid sceptic, and it was a singular fate for a man who believed in nothing to be so tenderly believed in. What his original faith had been he could hardly have told you; for as he came back to his childhood's home to mend his fortunes by pretending to fall in love, he was a thoroughly perverted creature, and overlaid with more corruptions than a summer day's questioning of his conscience would have put to flight. Ten years' pursuit of pleasure, which a bureau full of unpaid bills was all he had to show for, had pretty well stifled the natural lad whose violent will and generous temper might have been shaped by other circumstances to a result which a romantic imagination might fairly accept as a late-blooming flower of hereditary honour.

The Baron's violence had been subdued, and he had learned to be irreproachably polite ; but he had lost the fineness of his generosity, and his politeness, which in the long-run society paid for, was hardly more than a form of luxurious egotism, like his fondness for cambric handkerchiefs, lavender gloves, and other fopperies, by which shopkeepers remained out of pocket. In after years he was terribly polite to his wife. He had formed himself, as the phrase was, and the form prescribed to him by the society into which his birth and his tastes introduced him was marked by some peculiar features. That which mainly concerns us is its classification of the fairer half of humanity as objects not essentially different—say from the light gloves one soils in an evening and throws away. To do M. de Mauves justice, he had in the course of time encountered such plentiful evidence of this pliant glove-like quality in the feminine character, that idealism naturally seemed to him a losing game.

Euphemia, as he lay on his sofa, seemed by no means a refutation ; she simply reminded him that very young women are generally innocent, and that this, on the whole, is the most charming stage of their development. Her innocence inspired him with profound respect, and it seemed to him that if he shortly became her husband it would be exposed to a danger the less. Old Madame de Mauves, who flattered herself that in this whole matter she was very laudably rigid, might have learned a lesson from his gallant consideration. For a fortnight the Baron was almost a blushing boy again. He watched from behind the *Figaro*, and admired, and held his tongue. He was not in the least disposed towards a flirtation ; he had no desire to trouble the waters he proposed to transfuse into the golden cup of matrimony. Sometimes a word, a look, a movement of Euphemia's, gave him the oddest sense of being, or of seeming at least, almost bashful ; for she had a way of not dropping her eyes, according to the mysterious virginal mechanism—of not

fluttering out of the room when she found him there alone, of treating him rather as a benignant than as a pernicious influence—a radiant frankness of demeanour, in fine, in spite of an evident natural reserve, which it seemed equally graceless not to make the subject of a compliment and indelicate not to take for granted. In this way there was wrought in the Baron's mind a vague, unwonted resonance of soft impressions, as we may call it, which indicated the transmutation of "sentiment" from a contingency into a fact. His imagination enjoyed it; he was very fond of music, and this reminded him of some of the best he had ever heard. In spite of the bore of being laid up with a lame knee, he was in a better humour than he had known for months; he lay smoking cigarettes and listening to the nightingales, with the comfortable smile of one of his country neighbours whose big ox should have taken the prize at a fair. Every now and then, with an impatient suspicion of the resemblance, he declared that he was pitifully *bête*; but he was under a charm which braved even the supreme penalty of seeming ridiculous. One morning he had half an hour's *tête-à-tête* with his grandmother's confessor, a soft-voiced old Abbé, whom, for reasons of her own, Madame de Mauves had suddenly summoned, and had left waiting in the drawing-room while she re-arranged her curls. His reverence, going up to the old lady, assured her that M. le Baron was in a most edifying state of mind, and a promising subject for the operation of grace. This was a theological interpretation of the Baron's momentary good-humour. He had always lazily wondered what priests were good for, and he now remembered, with a sense of especial obligation to the Abbé, that they were excellent for marrying people.

A day or two after this he left off his bandages, and tried to walk. He made his way into the garden and hobbled successfully along one of the alleys; but in the midst of his progress he was seized with a spasm of pain

which forced him to stop and call for help. In an instant Euphemia came tripping along the path and offered him her arm with the frankest solicitude.

"Not to the house," he said, taking it; "farther on, to the bosquet." This choice was prompted by her having immediately confessed that she had seen him leave the house, had feared an accident, and had followed him on tiptoe.

"Why didn't you join me?" he had asked, giving her a look in which admiration was no longer disguised, and yet felt itself half at the mercy of her replying that a *jeune fille* should not be seen following a gentleman. But it drew a breath which filled its lungs for a long time afterwards, when she replied simply that if she had overtaken him he might have accepted her arm out of politeness, whereas she wished to have the pleasure of seeing him walk alone.

The bosquet was covered with an odorous tangle of blossoming creepers, and a nightingale overhead was shaking out love-notes with a profuseness which made the Baron consider his own conduct the perfection of propriety.

"In America," he said, "I have always heard that when a man wishes to marry a young girl, he offers himself simply, face to face, without any ceremony—without parents, and uncles, and cousins sitting round in a circle."

"Why, I believe so," said Euphemia, staring, and too surprised to be alarmed.

"Very well, then," said the Baron, "suppose our bosquet here to be America. I offer you my hand, à l'Américaine. It will make me intensely happy to see you accept it."

Whether Euphemia's acceptance was in the American manner is more than I can say; I incline to think that for fluttering, grateful, trustful, softly-amazed young hearts, there is only one manner all over the world.

That evening, in the little turret chamber which it was

her happiness to inhabit, she wrote a dutiful letter to her mamma, and had just sealed it when she was sent for by Madame de Mauves. She found this ancient lady seated in her boudoir, in a lavender satin gown, with all her candles lighted, as if to celebrate her grandson's betrothal. "Are you very happy?" Madame de Mauves demanded, making Euphemia sit down before her.

"I am almost afraid to say so," said the young girl, "lest I should wake myself up."

"May you never wake up, *belle enfant*," said the old lady, solemnly. "This is the first marriage ever made in our family in this way—by a Baron de Mauves proposing to a young girl in an arbour, like Jeannot and Jeannette. It has not been our way of doing things, and people may say it wants frankness. My grandson tells me he considers it the perfection of frankness. Very good. I am a very old woman, and if your differences should ever be as marked as your agreement, I should not like to see them. But I should be sorry to die and think you were going to be unhappy. You can't be, beyond a certain point; because, though in this world the Lord sometimes makes light of our expectations, He never altogether ignores our deserts. But you are very young, and innocent, and easy to deceive. There never was a man in the world—among the saints themselves—as good as you believe the Baron. But he's a *galant homme* and a gentleman, and I have been talking to him to-night. To you I want to say this—that you're to forget the worldly rubbish I talked the other day about frivolous women being happy. It's not the kind of happiness that would suit you. Whatever befalls you, promise me this: to be yourself. The Baronne de Mauves will be none the worse for it. Yourself, understand, in spite of everything—bad precepts, and bad examples, and usage, even. Be persistently and patiently yourself, and a De Mauves will do you justice!"

Euphemia remembered this speech in after years, and

more than once, wearily closing her eyes, she seemed to see the old woman sitting upright in her faded finery, and smiling grimly, like one of the Fates who sees the wheel of fortune turning up her favourite event. But at the moment it seemed to her simply to have the proper gravity of the occasion; this was the way, she supposed, in which lucky young girls were addressed on their engagement by wise old women of quality.

At her convent, to which she immediately returned, she found a letter from her mother, which shocked her far more than the remarks of Madame de Mauves. Who were these people, Mrs. Cleve demanded, who had presumed to talk to her daughter of marriage without asking her leave? Questionable gentlefolk, plainly; the best French people never did such things. Euphemia would return straightway to her convent, shut herself up, and await her own arrival.

It took Mrs. Cleve three weeks to travel from Nice to Paris, and during this time the young girl had no communication with her lover beyond accepting a bouquet of violets, marked with his initials, and left by a female friend. "I have not brought you up with such devoted care," she declared to her daughter at their first interview, "to marry a penniless Frenchman. I will take you straight home, and you will please to forget M. de Mauves."

Mrs. Cleve received that evening at her hotel a visit from the Baron, which mitigated her wrath, but failed to modify her decision. He had very good manners, but she was sure he had horrible morals; and Mrs. Cleve, who had been a very good-natured censor on her own account, felt a genuine spiritual need to sacrifice her daughter to propriety. She belonged to that large class of Americans who make light of their native land in familiar discourse, but are startled back into a sense of moral responsibility when they find Europeans taking them at their word. "I know the type, my dear," she

said to her daughter with a sagacious nod. "He will not beat you ; sometimes you will wish he would."

Euphemia remained solemnly silent ; for the only answer she felt capable of making her mother, was that her mind was too small a measure of things, and that the Baron's type was one which it took some mystical illumination to appreciate. A person who confounded him with the common throng of her watering-place acquaintance was not a person to argue with. It seemed to Euphemia that she had no cause to plead ; her cause was in the Lord's hands, and her lover's.

M. de Mauves had been irritated and mortified by Mrs. Cleve's opposition, and hardly knew how to handle an adversary who failed to perceive that a De Mauves of necessity gave more than he received. But he had obtained information on his return to Paris which exalted the uses of humility. Euphemia's fortune, wonderful to say, was greater than its fame, and in view of such a prize even a De Mauves could afford to take a snubbing.

The young man's tact, his deference, his urbane insistence, won a concession from Mrs. Cleve. The engagement was to be put off, and her daughter was to return home, be brought out and receive the homage she was entitled to, and which would but too surely take a form dangerous to the Baron's suit. They were to exchange neither letters, nor mementos, nor messages ; but if at the end of two years Euphemia had refused offers enough to attest the permanence of her attachment, he should receive an invitation to address her again.

This decision was promulgated in the presence of the parties interested. The Baron bore himself gallantly, and looked at the young girl, expecting some tender protestation. But she only looked at him silently in return, neither weeping, nor smiling, nor putting out her hand. On this they separated ; but as the Baron walked away, he declared to himself that, in spite of the confounded two years, he was a very happy fellow—to have

a fiancée who, to several millions of francs, added such strangely beautiful eyes.

How many offers Euphemia refused but scantily concerns us—and how the Baron wore his two years away. He found that he needed pastimes, and, as pastimes were expensive, he added heavily to the list of debts to be cancelled by Euphemia's millions. Sometimes, in the thick of what he had once called pleasure, with a keener conviction than now, he put to himself the case of their failing him after all ; and then he remembered that last mute assurance of her eyes, and drew a long breath of such confidence as he felt in nothing else in the world save his own punctuality in an affair of honour.

At last, one morning, he took the express to Havre, with a letter of Mrs. Cleve's in his pocket, and ten days later made his bow to mother and daughter in New York. His stay was brief, and he was apparently unable to bring himself to view what Euphemia's uncle, Mr. Butterworth, who gave her away at the altar, called our great experiment in democratic self-government, in a serious light. He smiled at everything, and seemed to regard the New World as a colossal *plaisanterie*. It is true that a perpetual smile was the most natural expression of countenance for a man about to marry Euphemia Cleve.

III.

LONGMORE's first visit seemed to open to him so large an opportunity for tranquil enjoyment that he very soon paid a second, and, at the end of a fortnight, had spent a great many hours in the little drawing-room which Madame de Mauves rarely quitted except to drive or walk in the forest. She lived in an old-fashioned pavilion, between a high-walled court and an excessively artificial garden, beyond

whose enclosure you saw a long line of tree-tops. Longmore liked the garden, and in the mild afternoons used to move his chair through the open window to the little terrace which overlooked it, while his hostess sat just within. After a while she came out and wandered through the narrow alleys and beside the thin-spouting fountain, and at last introduced him to a little gate in the garden wall, opening upon a lane which led to the forest. Hitherward, more than once, she wandered with him, bare-headed, and meaning to go but twenty rods, but always strolling good-naturedly farther, and often taking a generous walk. They discovered many things to talk about, and to the pleasure of finding the hours tread inaudibly away, Longmore was able to add the satisfaction of suspecting that he was a "resource" for Madame de Mauves. He had made her acquaintance with the sense, not altogether comfortable, that she was a woman with a painful secret, and that seeking her acquaintance would be like visiting at a house where there was an invalid who could bear no noise. But he very soon perceived that her sorrow, since sorrow it was, was not an aggressive one; that it was not fond of attitudes and ceremonies, and that her earnest wish was to forget it. He felt that even if Mrs. Draper had not told him she was unhappy, he would have guessed it; and yet he could hardly have pointed to his evidence. It was chiefly negative—she never alluded to her husband. Beyond this it seemed to him simply that her whole being was pitched on a lower key than harmonious Nature meant; she was like a powerful singer who had lost her high notes. She never drooped nor sighed, nor looked unutterable things; she indulged in no dusky sarcasms against fate; she had, in short, none of the coquetry of unhappiness. But Longmore was sure that her gentle gaiety was the result of strenuous effort, and that she was trying to interest herself in his thoughts to escape from her own. If she had wished to irritate his curiosity and lead him to take her confidence

by storm, nothing could have served her purpose better than this ingenuous reserve. He declared to himself that there was a rare magnanimity in such ardent self-effacement, and that but one woman in ten thousand was capable of merging an intensely personal grief in thankless outward contemplation. Madame de Mauves, he instinctively felt, was not sweeping the horizon for a compensation or a consoler ; she had suffered a personal deception which had disgusted her with persons. She was not striving to balance her sorrow with some strongly-seasoned joy ; for the present, she was trying to live with it, peaceably, respectably, and without scandal—turning the key on it occasionally, as you would on a companion liable to attacks of insanity. Longmore was a man of fine senses and of an active imagination, whose leading-strings had never been slipped. He began to regard his hostess as a figure haunted by a shadow which was somehow her intenser, more authentic self. This hovering mystery came to have for him an extraordinary charm. Her delicate beauty acquired to his eye the serious cast of certain blank-browed Greek statues ; and sometimes, when his imagination, more than his ear, detected a vague tremor in the tone in which she attempted to make a friendly question seemed to have behind it none of the hollow resonance of absent-mindedness, his marvelling eyes gave her an answer more eloquent, though much less to the point, than the one she demanded.

She gave him indeed much to wonder about, and in his ignorance he formed a dozen experimental theories on the subject of her marriage. She had married for love and staked her whole soul on it ; of that he was convinced. She had not married a Frenchman to be near Paris and her base of supplies of millinery ; he was sure she had seen conjugal happiness in a light of which her present life, with its conveniences for shopping and its moral aridity, was the absolute negation. But by what extraordinary process of the heart—through what mysterious inter-

mission of that moral instinct which may keep pace with the heart, even when this organ is making unprecedented time—had she fixed her affections on an arrogantly frivolous Frenchman? Longmore needed no telling; he knew M. de Mauves was frivolous; it was stamped on his eyes, his nose, his mouth, his carriage. For Frenchwomen Longmore had but a scanty kindness, or at least (what with him was very much the same thing) but a scanty gallantry; they all seemed to belong to the type of a certain fine lady to whom he had ventured to present a letter of introduction, and whom, directly after his first visit to her, he had set down in his note-book as “metallic.” Why should Madame de Mauves have chosen a Frenchwoman’s lot—she whose character had a perfume which is absent from even the brightest metals? He asked her one day frankly if it had cost her nothing to transplant herself—if she were not oppressed with a sense of irreconcilable difference from “all these people.” She was silent a while, and he fancied that she was hesitating as to whether she should resent so unceremonious an allusion to her husband. He almost wished she would; it would seem a proof that her deep reserve of sorrow had a limit.

“I almost grew up here,” she said at last, “and it was here for me that those dreams of the future took shape that we all have when we cease to be very young. As matters stand, one may be very American and yet arrange it with one’s conscience to live in Europe. My imagination perhaps—I had a little when I was younger—helped me to think I should find happiness here. And after all, for a woman, what does it signify? This is not America, perhaps, about me, but it’s quite as little France. France is out there, beyond the garden, in the town, in the forest; but here, close about me, in my room and”—she paused a moment—“in my mind, it’s a nameless country of my own. It’s not her country,” she added, “that makes a woman happy or unhappy.”

Madame Clairin, Euphemia’s sister-in-law, might have

been supposed to have undertaken the graceful task of making Longmore ashamed of his uncivil jottings about her sex and nation. Mademoiselle de Mauves, bringing example to the confirmation of precept, had made a remunerative match, and sacrificed her name to the millions of a prosperous and aspiring wholesale druggist—a gentleman liberal enough to consider his fortune a moderate price for being towed into circles unpervaded by pharmaceutical odours. His system, possibly, was sound, but his own application of it was unfortunate. M. Clairin's head was turned by his good luck. Having secured an aristocratic wife, he adopted an aristocratic vice, and began to gamble at the Bourse. In an evil hour he lost heavily, and then staked heavily to recover himself. But he overtook his loss only by a greater one. Then he let everything go—his wits, his courage, his probity—everything that had made him what his ridiculous marriage had so promptly unmade. He walked up the Rue Vivienne one day with his hands in his empty pockets, and stood for half an hour staring confusedly up and down the glittering Boulevard. People brushed against him, and half a dozen carriages almost ran over him, until at last a policeman, who had been watching him for some time, took him by the arm and led him gently away. He looked at the man's cocked hat and sword with tears in his eyes; he hoped he was going to interpret to him the wrath of Heaven—to execute the penalty of his dead weight of self-abhorrence. But the *sergent de ville* only stationed him in the embrasure of a door, out of harm's way, and walked away to supervise a financial contest between an old lady and a cabman. Poor M. Clairin had only been married a year, but he had had time to measure the lofty spirit of a De Mauves. When night had fallen, he repaired to the house of a friend and asked for a night's lodging; and as his friend, who was simply his old head book-keeper, and lived in a small way, was put to some trouble to accommodate him—"You must excuse me," Clairin

said, "but I can't go home. I am afraid of my wife!" Towards morning he blew his brains out. His widow turned the remnants of his property to better account than could have been expected, and wore the very handsomest mourning. It was for this latter reason, perhaps, that she was obliged to retrench at other points, and accept a temporary home under her brother's roof.

Fortune had played Madame Clairin a terrible trick, but had found an adversary and not a victim. Though quite without beauty, she had always had what is called the grand air, and her air from this time forward was grander than ever. As she trailed about in her sable furbelows, tossing back her well-dressed head, and holding up her vigilant eye-glass, she seemed to be sweeping the whole field of society and asking herself where she should pluck her revenge. Suddenly she espied it, ready made to her hand, in poor Longmore's wealth and amiability. American dollars and American complaisance had made her brother's fortune; why should they not make hers? She over-estimated Longmore's wealth, and misinterpreted his amiability; for she was sure that a man could not be so contented without being rich, nor so unassuming without being weak. He encountered her advances with a formal politeness which covered a great deal of unflattering discomposure. She made him feel acutely uncomfortable; and though he was at a loss to conceive how he could be an object of interest to a shrewd Parisienne, he had an indefinable sense of being enclosed in a magnetic circle, like the victim of an incantation. If Madame Clairin could have fathomed his Puritanic soul, she would have laid by her wand and her book and admitted that he was an impossible subject. She gave him a kind of moral chill, and he never mentally alluded to her save as that dreadful woman—that terrible woman. He did justice to her grand air, but for his pleasure he preferred the small air of Madame de Mauves; and he never made her his bow, after stand-

ing frigidly passive for five minutes to one of her gracious overtures to intimacy, without feeling a peculiar desire to ramble away into the forest, fling himself down on the warm grass, and, staring up at the blue sky, forget that there were any women in nature who didn't please like the swaying tree-tops. One day, on his arrival, she met him in the court and told him that her sister-in-law was shut up with a headache, and that his visit must be for her. He followed her into the drawing-room with the best grace at his command, and sat twirling his hat for half an hour. Suddenly he understood her; the caressing cadence of her voice was a distinct invitation to solicit the incomparable honour of her hand. He blushed to the roots of his hair and jumped up with uncontrollable alacrity; then, dropping a glance at Madame Clairin, who sat watching him with hard eyes over the edge of her smile, as it were, perceived on her brow a flash of unforgiving wrath. It was not becoming, but his eyes lingered a moment, for it seemed to illuminate her character. What he saw there frightened him, and he felt himself murmuring, "Poor Madame de Mauves!" His departure was abrupt, and this time he really went into the forest and lay down on the grass.

After this he admired Madame de Mauves more than ever; she seemed a brighter figure, with a darker shadow appended to it. At the end of a month he received a letter from a friend with whom he had arranged a tour through the Low Countries, reminding him of his promise to meet him promptly at Brussels. It was only after his answer was posted that he fully measured the zeal with which he had declared that the journey must either be deferred or abandoned—that he could not possibly leave Saint-Germain. He took a walk in the forest, and asked himself if this were irrevocably true. If it were, surely his duty was to march straight home and pack his trunk. Poor Webster, who, he knew, had counted ardently on this excursion, was an excellent

fellow ; six weeks ago he would have gone through fire and water to join Webster. It had never been in his books to throw overboard a friend whom he had loved for ten years for a married woman whom for six weeks he had—admired. It was certainly beyond question that he was lingering at Saint-Germain because this admirable married woman was there ; but in the midst of all this admiration, what had become of prudence ? This was the conduct of a man drifting rapidly into passion. If she were as unhappy as he believed, the passion of such a man would help her very little more than his indifference ; if she were less so, she needed no help, and could dispense with his friendly offices. He was sure, moreover, that if she knew he was staying on her account she would be extremely annoyed. But this very feeling had much to do with making it hard to go ; her displeasure would only enhance the gentle stoicism which touched him to the heart. At moments, indeed, he assured himself that to linger was simply impertinent ; it was indelicate to make a daily study of such a shrinking grief. But inclination answered that some day her self-support would fail, and he had a vision of this admirable creature calling vainly for help. He would be her friend, to any length ; it was unworthy to both of them to think about consequences. But he was a friend who carried about with him a muttering resentment that he had not known her five years earlier, and a brooding hostility to those who had anticipated him. It seemed one of fortune's most mocking strokes that she should be surrounded by persons whose only merit was that they threw the charm of her character into radiant relief.

Longmore's growing irritation made it more and more difficult for him to see any other merit than this in the Baron de Mauves. And yet, disinterestedly, it would have been hard to give a name to the portentous vices which such an estimate implied, and there were times

when our hero was almost persuaded against his finer judgment that he was really the most considerate of husbands, and that his wife liked melancholy for melancholy's sake. His manners were perfect, his urbanity was unbounded, and he seemed never to address her but, sentimentally speaking, hat in hand. His tone to Longmore (as the latter was perfectly aware) was that of a man of the world to a man not quite of the world; but what it lacked in deference it made up in easy friendliness. "I can't thank you enough for having overcome my wife's shyness," he more than once declared. "If we left her to do as she pleased, she would bury herself alive. Come often, and bring some one else. She will have nothing to do with my friends, but perhaps she will look at yours."

The Baron made these speeches with a remorseless placidity very amazing to our hero, who had an innocent belief that a man's head may point out to him the shortcomings of his heart, and make him ashamed of them. He could not fancy him capable both of neglecting his wife and taking an almost humorous view of her suffering. Longmore had, at any rate, an exasperating sense that the Baron thought rather the less of his wife on account of that very same fine difference of nature which so deeply stirred his own sympathies. He was rarely present during Longmore's visits, and he made a daily journey to Paris, where he had "business," as he once mentioned—not in the least with a tone of apology. When he appeared, it was late in the evening, and with an imperturbable air of being on the best of terms with every one and everything, which was peculiarly annoying if you happened to have a tacit quarrel with him. If he was a good fellow, he was surely a good fellow spoiled. Something he had, however, which Longmore vaguely envied—a kind of superb positiveness—a manner rounded and polished by the traditions of centuries—an urbanity exercised for his own sake and not his neighbours'—

which seemed the result of something better than a good conscience—of a vigorous and unscrupulous temperament. The Baron was plainly not a moral man, and poor Longmore, who was, would have been glad to learn the secret of his luxurious serenity. What was it that enabled him, without being a monster with visibly cloven feet, exhaling brimstone, to misprize so cruelly a lovely wife, and to walk about the world with a candid smile under his moustache? It was the essential grossness of his imagination, which had nevertheless helped him to turn so many neat compliments. He could be very polite, and he could doubtless be supremely impertinent; but he was as unable to draw a moral inference of the finer strain as a school-boy who has been playing truant for a week to solve a problem in algebra. It was ten to one he did not know his wife was unhappy; he and his brilliant sister had doubtless agreed to consider their companion a Puritanical little person, of meagre aspirations and slender accomplishments, contented with looking at Paris from the terrace, and, as an especial treat, having a countryman very much like herself to supply her with homely transatlantic gossip. M. de Mauves was tired of his companion; he relished a higher flavour in female society. She was too modest, too simple, too delicate; she had too few arts, too little coquetry, too much charity. M. de Mauves, some day, lighting a cigar, had probably decided she was stupid. It was the same sort of taste, Longmore moralised, as the taste for Gérôme in painting, and for M. Charles Baudelaire in literature. The Baron was a pagan and his wife was a Christian, and between them, accordingly, was a gulf. He was by race and instinct a *grand seigneur*. Longmore had often heard of this distinguished social type, and was properly grateful for an opportunity to examine it closely. It had certainly a picturesque boldness of outline, but it was fed from spiritual sources so remote from those of which he felt the living gush of his own

soul, that he found himself gazing at it, in irreconcilable antipathy, across a dim historic mist. "I am a modern *bourgeois*," he said, "and not perhaps so good a judge of how far a pretty woman's tongue may go at supper without prejudice to her reputation. But I have not met one of the sweetest of women without recognising her, and discovering that a certain sort of character offers better entertainment than Thérésa's songs, sung by a dissipated duchess. Wit for wit, I think mine carries me farther." It was easy indeed to perceive that, as became a *grand seigneur*, M. de Mauves had a stock of social principles. He would not especially have desired, perhaps, that his wife should compete in amateur operettas with the duchess in question, chiefly of recent origin; but he held that a gentleman may take his amusement where he finds it, that he is quite at liberty not to find it at home, and that the wife of a De Mauves who should hang her head and have red eyes, and allow herself to make any other response to officious condolence than that her husband's amusements were his own affair, would have forfeited every claim to having her finger-tips bowed over and kissed. And yet in spite of this definite faith, Longmore fancied that the Baron was more irritated than gratified by his wife's irreproachable reserve. Did it dimly occur to him that it was self-control and not self-effacement? She was a model to all the inferior matrons of his line, past and to come, and an occasional "scene" from her at a convenient moment would have something re-assuring—would attest her stupidity a trifle more forcibly than her inscrutable tranquillity.

Longmore would have given much to know the principle of her submissiveness, and he tried more than once, but with rather awkward timidity, to sound the mystery. She seemed to him to have been long resisting the force of cruel evidence, and, though she had succumbed to it at last, to have denied herself the right to

complain, because if faith was gone, her heroic generosity remained. He believed even that she was capable of reproaching herself with having expected too much, and of trying to persuade herself out of her bitterness by saying that her hopes had been illusions, and that this was simply—life. “I hate tragedy,” she once said to him; “I have a really pusillanimous dread of moral suffering. I believe that—without base concessions—there is always some way of escaping from it. I would almost rather never smile all my life than have a single violent explosion of grief.” She lived evidently in nervous apprehension of being fatally convinced—of seeing to the end of her deception. Longmore, when he thought of this, felt an immense longing to offer her something of which she could be as sure as of the sun in heaven.

IV.

HIS friend Webster lost no time in accusing him of the basest infidelity, and asking him what he found at Saint-Germain to prefer to Van Eyck and Memling, Rubens and Rembrandt. A day or two after the receipt of Webster’s letter he took a walk with Madame de Mauves in the forest. They sat down on a fallen log, and she began to arrange into a bouquet the anemones and violets she had gathered. “I have a letter,” he said at last, “from a friend whom I some time ago promised to join at Brussels. The time has come—it has passed. It finds me terribly unwilling to leave Saint-Germain.”

She looked up with the candid interest which she always displayed in his affairs, but with no disposition, apparently, to make a personal application of his words. “Saint-Germain is pleasant enough,” she said; “but are you doing yourself justice? Shall you not regret in

future days that, instead of travelling and seeing cities and monuments and museums and improving your mind, you sat here—for instance—on a log, pulling my flowers to pieces?”

“What I shall regret in future days,” he answered, after some hesitation, “is that I should have sat here and not spoken the truth on the matter. I am fond of museums and monuments and of improving my mind, and I am particularly fond of my friend Webster. But I can’t bring myself to leave Saint-Germain without asking you a question. You must forgive me if it’s indiscreet, and be assured that curiosity was never more respectful. Are you really as unhappy as I imagine you to be?”

She had evidently not expected his question, and she greeted it with a startled blush. “If I strike you as unhappy,” she said, “I have been a poorer friend to you than I wished to be.”

“I, perhaps, have been a better friend of yours than you have supposed. I have admired your reserve, your courage, your studied gaiety. But I have felt the existence of something beneath them that was more *you*—more you as I wished to know you—than they were; something that I have believed to be a constant sorrow.”

She listened with great gravity, but without an air of offence, and he felt that while he had been timorously calculating the last consequences of friendship, she had serenely accepted them. “You surprise me,” she said slowly, and her blush still lingered. “But to refuse to answer you would confirm an impression on your part which is evidently already too strong. An unhappiness that one can sit comfortably talking about, is an unhappiness with distinct limitations. If I were examined before a board of commissioners for investigating the felicity of mankind, I am sure I should be pronounced a very fortunate woman.” There was something delightfully gentle to him in her tone, and its softness seemed

to deepen as she continued. "But let me add, with all gratitude for your sympathy, that it's my own affair altogether. It need not disturb you, Mr. Longmore, for I have often found myself in your company a very contented person."

"You are a wonderful woman," he said, "and I admire you as I never have admired any one. You are wiser than anything I, for one, can say to you; and what I ask of you is not to let me advise or console you, but simply thank you for letting me know you." He had intended no such outburst as this, but his voice rang loud, and he felt a kind of unfamiliar joy as he uttered it.

She shook her head with some impatience. "Let us be friends—as I supposed we were going to be—without protestations and fine words. To have you paying compliments to my wisdom—that would be real wretchedness. I can dispense with your admiration better than the Flemish painters can—better than Van Eyck and Rubens, in spite of all their worshippers. Go join your friend—see everything, enjoy everything, learn everything, and write me an excellent letter, brimming over with your impressions. I am extremely fond of the Dutch painters," she added, with a slight faltering of the voice, which Longmore had noticed once before, and which he had interpreted as the sudden weariness of a spirit self-condemned to play a part.

"I don't believe you care a button about the Dutch painters," he said, with an unhesitating laugh. "But I shall certainly write you a letter."

She rose and turned homeward, thoughtfully re-arranging her flowers as she walked. Little was said; Longmore was asking himself, with a tremor in the unspoken words, whether all this meant simply that he was in love. He looked at the rooks wheeling against the golden-hued sky, between the tree-tops, but not at his companion, whose personal presence seemed lost in the felicity she had created. Madame de Mauves was silent and grave,

because she was painfully disappointed. A sentimental friendship she had not desired ; her scheme had been to pass with Longmore as a placid creature with a good deal of leisure, which she was disposed to devote to profitable conversation of an impersonal sort. She liked him extremely, and felt that there was something in him to which, when she made up her girlish mind that a needy French baron was the ripest fruit of time, she had done very scanty justice. They went through the little gate in the garden wall and approached the house. On the terrace Madame Clairin was entertaining a friend—a little elderly gentleman with a white moustache, and an order in his button-hole. Madame de Mauves chose to pass round the house into the court ; whereupon her sister-in-law, greeting Longmore with a commanding nod, lifted her eye-glass and stared at them as they went by. Longmore heard the little old gentleman uttering some old-fashioned epigram about “*la vieille galanteria Française*,” and then, by a sudden impulse, he looked at Madame de Mauves and wondered what she was doing in such a world. She stopped before the house, without asking him to come in. “I hope you will act upon my advice,” she said, “and waste no more time at Saint-Germain.”

For an instant there rose to his lips some faded compliment about his time not being wasted, but it expired before the simple sincerity of her look. She stood there as gently serious as the angel of disinterestedness, and Longmore felt as if he should insult her by treating her words as a bait for flattery. “I shall start in a day or two,” he answered, “but I will not promise you not to come back.”

“I hope not,” she said, simply. “I expect to be here a long time.”

“I shall come and say good-bye,” he rejoined ; on which she nodded with a smile, and went in.

He turned away, and walked slowly homeward by the

terrace. It seemed to him that to leave her thus, for a gain on which she herself insisted, was to know her better and admire her more. But he was in a vague ferment of feeling which her evasion of his question half an hour before had done more to deepen than to allay. Suddenly, on the terrace, he encountered M. de Mauves, who was leaning against the parapet, finishing a cigar. The Baron, who, he fancied, had an air of peculiar affability, offered him his white plump hand. Longmore stopped; he felt a sudden angry desire to cry out to him that he had the loveliest wife in the world; that he ought to be ashamed of himself not to know it; and that for all his shrewdness he had never looked into the depths of her eyes. The Baron, we know, considered that he had; but there was something in Euphemia's eyes now that was not there five years before. They talked for a while about various things, and M. de Mauves gave a humorous account of his visit to America. His tone was not soothing to Longmore's excited sensibilities. He seemed to consider the country a gigantic joke, and his urbanity only went so far as to admit that it was not a bad one. Longmore was not, by habit, an aggressive apologist for his native institutions; but the Baron's narrative confirmed his worst impressions of French superficiality. He had understood nothing, he had felt nothing, he had learned nothing; and our hero, glancing askance at his aristocratic profile, declared that if the chief merit of a long pedigree was to leave one so fatuously stupid, he thanked his stars that the Longmores had emerged from obscurity in the present century, in the person of an enterprising timber-merchant. M. de Mauves dwelt of course on that prime oddity of ours—the liberty allowed to young girls; and related the history of his researches into the “opportunities” it presented to French noblemen—researches in which, during a fortnight's stay, he seemed to have spent many agreeable hours. “I am bound to admit,” he said,

"that in every case I was disarmed by the extreme candour of the young lady, and that they took care of themselves to better purpose than I have seen some mammas in France take care of them." Longmore greeted this handsome concession with the grimmest of smiles, and damned his impertinent patronage.

Mentioning at last that he was about to leave Saint-Germain, he was surprised, without exactly being flattered, by the Baron's quickened attention. "I am so very sorry!" the latter cried. "I hoped we had you for the whole summer." Longmore murmured something civil, and wondered why M. de Mauves should care whether he stayed or went. "You were a distraction to Madame de Mauves," the Baron added; "I assure you I mentally blessed your visits."

"They were a great pleasure to me," Longmore said, gravely. "Some day I expect to come back."

"Pray do;" and the Baron laid his hand urgently on his arm. "You see I have confidence in you." Longmore was silent for a moment, and the Baron puffed his cigar reflectively and watched the smoke. "Madame de Mauves," he said at last, "is a rather singular person."

Longmore shifted his position, and wondered whether he were going to "explain" Madame de Mauves.

"Being, as you are, her fellow-countryman," the Baron went on, "I don't mind speaking frankly. She's just a little morbid—the most charming woman in the world, as you see, but a little fanciful—a little *entêtée*. Now you see she has taken this extraordinary fancy for solitude. I can't get her to go anywhere—to see any one. When my friends present themselves she is perfectly polite, but she is simply freezing. She doesn't do herself justice, and I expect every day to hear two or three of them say to me, 'Your wife is *jolie à croquer*: what a pity she hasn't a little *esprit*.' You must have found out that she has really a great deal. But to tell the whole truth, what she needs is to forget herself.

She sits alone for hours poring over her English books, and looking at life through that terrible brown fog which they always seem to me to fling over the world. I doubt if your English authors," the Baron continued, with a serenity which Longmore afterwards characterised as sublime, "are very sound reading for young married women. I don't pretend to know much about them; but I remember that, not long after our marriage, Madame de Mauves undertook to read me one day a certain Wordsworth—a poet highly esteemed, it appears, *chez vous*. It seemed to me that she took me by the nape of the neck, and held my head for half an hour over a basin of *soupe aux choux*, and that one ought to ventilate the drawing-room before any one called. But I suppose you know him—*ce génie-là*. I think my wife never forgave me, and that it was a real shock to her to find she had married a man who had very much the same taste in literature as in cookery. But you are a man of general culture—a man of the world," said the Baron, turning to Longmore, and fixing his eyes on the seal of his watch-guard. "You can talk about everything, and I am sure you like Alfred de Musset as well as Monsieur Wordsworth. Talk to her about everything, Alfred de Musset included. Bah! I forgot that you are going. Come back, then, as soon as possible and talk about your travels. If Madame de Mauves, too, would make a little voyage, it would do her good. It would enlarge her horizon"—and M. de Mauves made a series of short nervous jerks with his stick in the air—"it would wake up her imagination. She's too rigid, you know—it would show her that one may bend a trifle without breaking." He paused a moment, and gave two or three vigorous puffs. Then, turning to his companion again, with a little nod, and a confidential smile—"I hope you admire my candour. I wouldn't say all this to one of *us*!"

Evening was coming on, and the lingering light seemed to float in the air in faintly-golden motes. Longmore

stood gazing at these luminous particles ; he could almost have fancied them a swarm of humming insects, murmuring as a refrain, "She has a great deal of *esprit*—she has a great deal of *esprit*." "Yes, she has a great deal," he said, mechanically, turning to the Baron. M. de Mauves glanced at him sharply, as if to ask what the deuce he was talking about. "She has a great deal of intelligence," said Longmore, deliberately, "a great deal of beauty, a great many virtues."

M. de Mauves busied himself for a moment in lighting another cigar, and when he had finished, with a return of his confidential smile, "I suspect you of thinking that I don't do my wife justice," he said. "Take care—take care, young man ; that's a dangerous assumption. In general a man always does his wife justice. More than justice," cried the Baron, with a laugh—"that we keep for the wives of other men !"

Longmore afterwards remembered it in favour of the Baron's fine manner, that he had not measured at this moment the dusky abyss over which it hovered. But a sort of deepening subterranean echo lingered on his spiritual ear. For the present his keenest sensation was a desire to get away, and cry aloud that M. de Mauves was an arrogant fool. He bade him an abrupt good-night, which was to serve also, he said, as good-bye.

"Decidedly, then, you go?" said M. de Mauves, almost peremptorily.

"Decidedly."

"Of course you will come and say good-bye to Madame de Mauves?" His tone implied that the omission would be very uncivil ; but there seemed to Longmore something so ludicrous in his taking a lesson in consideration from M. de Mauves, that he burst into a laugh. The Baron frowned, like a man for whom it was a new and most unpleasant sensation to be perplexed. "You are a queer fellow," he murmured, as Longmore turned away, not foreseeing that he should

think him a very queer fellow indeed before he had done with him.

Longmore sat down to dinner at his hotel with his usual good intentions; but as he was lifting his first glass of wine to his lips he suddenly fell to musing, and set down his wine untasted. His reverie lasted long, and when he emerged from it, his fish was cold; but this mattered little, for his appetite was gone. That evening he packed his trunk with a kind of indignant energy. This was so effective that the operation was accomplished before bedtime, and as he was not in the least sleepy, he devoted the interval to writing two letters; one was a short note to Madame de Mauves, which he entrusted to a servant, to be delivered the next morning. He had found it best, he said, to leave Saint-Germain immediately, but he expected to be back in Paris in the early autumn. The other letter was the result of his having remembered a day or two before that he had not yet complied with Mrs. Draper's injunction to give her an account of his impressions of her friend. The present occasion seemed propitious, and he wrote half a dozen pages. His tone, however, was grave, and Mrs. Draper, on receiving them, was slightly disappointed—she would have preferred a stronger flavour of rhapsody. But what chiefly concerns us is the concluding sentences.

“The only time she ever spoke to me of her marriage,” he wrote, “she intimated that it had been a perfect love-match. With all abatements, I suppose most marriages are; but in her case, I think, this would mean more than in that of most women; for her love was an absolute idealisation. She believed her husband was a hero of rose-coloured romance, and he turns out to be not even a hero of very sad-coloured reality. For some time now she has been sounding her mistake, but I don't believe she has touched the bottom of it yet. She strikes me as a person who is begging off from full knowledge—who has struck a truce with painful truth, and is trying a while

the experiment of living with closed eyes. In the dark she tries to see again the gilding on her idol. Illusion of course is illusion, and one must always pay for it; but there is something truly tragical in seeing an earthly penalty levied on such divine folly as this. As for M. de Mauves, he's a Frenchman to his fingers' ends; and I confess I should dislike him for this if he were a much better man. He can't forgive his wife for having married him too sentimentally and loved him too well; for in some uncorrupted corner of his being he feels, I suppose, that as she saw him, so he ought to have been. It is a perpetual vexation to him that a little American bourgeoisie should have fancied him a finer fellow than he is, or than he at all wants to be. He has not a glimmering of real acquaintance with his wife; he can't understand the stream of passion flowing so clear and still. To tell the truth, I hardly can understand it myself; but when I see the spectacle I can admire it furiously. M. de Mauves, at any rate, would like to have the comfort of feeling that his wife is as corruptible as himself; and you will hardly believe me when I tell you that he goes about intimating to gentlemen whom he deems worthy of the knowledge, that it would be a convenience to him that they should make love to her."

V.

ON reaching Paris Longmore straightway purchased a Murray's *Belgium*, to help himself to believe that he would start on the morrow for Brussels; but when the morrow came it occurred to him that, by way of preparation, he ought to acquaint himself more intimately with the Flemish painters in the Louvre. This took a whole morning, but it did little to hasten his departure.

He had abruptly left Saint-Germain, because it seemed to him that respect for Madame de Mauves demanded that he should allow her husband no reason to suppose that he had understood him; but now that he had satisfied the behest of delicacy, he found himself thinking more and more ardently of Euphemia. It was a poor expression of ardour to be lingering irresolutely on the deserted Boulevards, but he detested the idea of leaving Saint-Germain five hundred miles behind him. He felt very foolish, nevertheless, and wandered about nervously, promising himself to take the next train; but a dozen trains started, and Longmore was still in Paris. This sentimental tumult was more than he had bargained for, and, as he looked at the shop windows, he wondered whether it was a "passion." He had never been fond of the word, and had grown up with a kind of horror of what it represented. He had hoped that when he should fall in love he should do it with an excellent conscience, with no greater agitation than a mild suffusion of cheerfulness. But here was a sentiment concocted of pity and anger, as well as of admiration, and bristling with scruples and doubts. He had come abroad to enjoy the Flemish painters and all others; but what fair-tressed saint of Van Eyck or Memling was so interesting a figure as Madame de Mauves? His restless steps carried him at last out of the long villa-bordered avenue which leads to the Bois de Boulogne.

Summer had fairly begun, and the drive beside the lake was empty, but there were various loungers on the benches and chairs, and the great café had an air of animation. Longmore's walk had given him an appetite, and he went into the establishment and demanded a dinner, remarking for the hundredth time, as he observed the smart little tables disposed in the open air, how much better they ordered this matter in France.

"Will Monsieur dine in the garden, or in the saloon?" asked the waiter. Longmore chose the garden; and

observing that a great cluster of June roses was trained over the wall of the house, placed himself at a table near by, where the best of dinners was served him on the whitest of linen, in the most shining of porcelain. It so happened that his table was near a window, and that as he sat he could look into a corner of the saloon. So it was that his attention rested on a lady seated just within the window, which was open, face to face apparently with a companion who was concealed by the curtain. She was a very pretty woman, and Longmore looked at her as often as was consistent with good manners. After a while he even began to wonder who she was, and to suspect that she was one of those ladies whom it is no breach of good manners to look at as often as you like. Longmore, too, if he had been so disposed, would have been the more free to give her all his attention, that her own was fixed upon the person opposite to her. She was what the French call a *belle brune*, and though our hero, who had rather a conservative taste in such matters, had no great relish for her bold outlines and even bolder colouring, he could not help admiring her expression of basking contentment.

She was evidently very happy, and her happiness gave her an air of innocence. The talk of her friend, whoever he was, abundantly suited her humour, for she sat listening to him with a broad, lazy smile, and interrupted him occasionally, while she crunched her bon-bons, with a murmured response, presumably as broad, which seemed to deepen his eloquence. She drank a great deal of champagne, and ate an immense number of strawberries, and was plainly altogether a person with an impartial relish for strawberries, champagne, and what she would have called *bêtises*.

They had half finished dinner when Longmore sat down, and he was still in his place when they rose. She had hung her bonnet on a nail above her chair, and her companion passed round the table to take it down

for her. As he did so she bent her head to look at a wine-stain on her dress, and in the movement exposed the greater part of the back of a very handsome neck. The gentleman observed it, and observed also, apparently, that the room beyond them was empty; that he stood within eyeshot of Longmore he failed to observe. He stooped suddenly and imprinted a gallant kiss on the fair expanse. Longmore then recognised M. de Mauves. The recipient of this vigorous tribute put on her bonnet, using his flushed smile as a mirror, and in a moment they passed through the garden, on their way to their carriage.

Then, for the first time, M. de Mauves perceived Longmore. He measured with a rapid glance the young man's relation to the open window, and checked himself in the impulse to stop and speak to him. He contented himself with bowing with great gravity as he opened the gate for his companion.

That evening Longmore made a railway journey, but not to Brussels. He had effectually ceased to care about Brussels; the only thing he now cared about was Madame de Mauves. The atmosphere of his mind had had a sudden clearing up; pity and anger were still throbbing there, but they had space to rage at their pleasure, for doubts and scruples had abruptly departed. It was little, he felt, that he could interpose between her resignation and the indignity of her position; but that little, if it involved the sacrifice of everything that bound him to the tranquil past, he could offer her with a rapture which at last made reflection appear a wofully halting substitute for faith. Nothing in his tranquil past had given such a zest to consciousness as this happy sense of choosing to go straight back to Saint-Germain. How to justify his return, how to explain his ardour, troubled him little. He was not sure, even, that he wished to be understood; he wished only to feel that it was by no fault of his that Madame de Mauves was alone

with the ugliness of fate. He was conscious of no distinct desire to "make love" to her; if he could have uttered the essence of his longing, he would have said that he wished her to remember that in a world coloured gray to her vision by disappointment, there was one vividly honest man. She might certainly have remembered it, however, without his coming back to remind her; and it is not to be denied that, as he waited for the morrow, he wished immensely to hear the sound of her voice.

He waited the next day till his usual hour of calling—the late afternoon; but he learned at the door that Madame de Mauves was not at home. The servant offered the information that she was walking in the forest. Longmore went through the garden and out of the little door into the lane, and, after half an hour's vain exploration, saw her coming toward him at the end of a green by-path. As he appeared, she stopped for a moment, as if to turn aside; then recognising him, she slowly advanced, and he was soon shaking hands with her.

"Nothing has happened," she said, looking at him fixedly. "You are not ill?"

"Nothing, except that when I got to Paris I found how fond I had grown of Saint-Germain."

She neither smiled nor looked flattered; it seemed indeed to Longmore that she was annoyed. But he was uncertain, for he immediately perceived that in his absence the whole character of her face had altered. It told him that something momentous had happened. It was no longer self-contained melancholy that he read in her eyes, but grief and agitation, which had lately struggled with that passionate love of peace of which she had spoken to him, and forced him to know that deep experience is never peaceful. She was pale, and she had evidently been shedding tears. He felt his heart beating hard; he seemed now to know her secrets. She

continued to look at him with a contracted brow, as if his return had given her a sense of responsibility too great to be disguised by a commonplace welcome. For some moments, as he turned and walked beside her, neither spoke; then abruptly—"Tell me truly, Mr. Longmore," she said, "why you have come back."

He turned and looked at her with an air which startled her into a certainty of which she had feared. "Because I have learned the real answer to the question I asked you the other day. You are not happy—you are too good to be happy on the terms offered you. Madame de Mauves," he went on, with a gesture which protested against a gesture of her own, "I can't be happy if you are not! I don't care for anything so long as I see such an unfathomable sadness in your eyes. I found during three dreary days in Paris that the thing in the world I most care for is this daily privilege of seeing you. I know it's very brutal to tell you I admire you: it's an insult to you to treat you as if you had complained to me or appealed to me. But such a friendship as I waked up to there"—and he tossed his head toward the distant city—"is a potent force, I assure you; and when forces are compressed they explode. But if you had told me every trouble in your heart, it would have mattered little; I couldn't say more than I must say now—that if that in life from which you have hoped most has given you least, this devoted respect of mine will refuse no service and betray no trust."

She had begun to make marks in the earth with the point of her parasol; but she stopped and listened to him in perfect immobility. Rather, her immobility was not perfect; for when he stopped speaking a faint flush had stolen into her cheek. It told Longmore that she was moved, and his first perceiving it was the happiest instant of his life. She raised her eyes at last, and looked at him with what at first seemed a pleading dread of excessive emotion.

"Thank you—thank you!" she said, calmly enough: but the next moment her own emotion overcame her calmness, and she burst into tears. Her tears vanished as quickly as they came, but they did Longmore a world of good. He had always felt indefinitely afraid of her; her being had somehow seemed fed by a deeper faith and a stronger will than his own; but her half-dozen smothered sobs showed him the bottom of her heart, and assured him that she was weak enough to be grateful.

"Excuse me," she said; "I am too nervous to listen to you. I believe I could have encountered an enemy to-day, but I can't endure a friend."

"You are killing yourself with stoicism—that is what is the matter with you!" he cried. "Listen to a friend for his own sake, if not for yours. I have never ventured to offer you an atom of compassion, and you can't accuse yourself of an abuse of charity."

She looked about her with a kind of weary confusion which promised a reluctant attention. But suddenly perceiving by the wayside the fallen log on which they had rested a few evenings before, she went and sat down on it in impatient resignation, and looked at Longmore, as he stood silent, watching her, with a glance which seemed to urge that, if she was charitable now, he must be very wise.

"Something came to my knowledge yesterday," he said as he sat down beside her, "which gave me an intense impression of your loneliness. You are truth itself, and there is no truth about you. You believe in purity and duty and dignity, and you live in a world in which they are daily belied. I sometimes ask myself with a kind of rage how you ever came into such a world—and why the perversity of fate never let me know you before."

"I like my 'world' no better than you do, and it was not for its own sake I came into it. But what particular group of people is worth pinning one's faith upon?

I confess it sometimes seems to me that men and women are very poor creatures. I suppose I am romantic. I have an unfortunate taste for poetic fitness. Life is hard prose, and one must learn to read prose contentedly. I believe I once thought that all the prose was in America, which was very foolish. What I thought, what I believed, what I expected, when I was an ignorant girl, fatally addicted to falling in love with my own theories, is more than I can begin to tell you now. Sometimes, when I remember certain impulses, certain illusions of those days, they take away my breath, and I wonder that my false point of view has not led me into troubles greater than any I have now to lament. I had a conviction which you would probably smile at if I were to attempt to express it to you. It was a singular form for passionate faith to take, but it had all of the sweetness and the ardour of passionate faith. It led me to take a great step, and it lies behind me now in the distance, like a shadow melting slowly in the light of experience. It has faded, but it has not vanished. Some feelings, I am sure, die only with ourselves; some illusions are as much the condition of our life as our heart-beats. They say that life itself is an illusion—that this world is a shadow of which the reality is yet to come. Life is all of a piece, then, and there is no shame in being miserably human. As for my loneliness, it doesn't greatly matter; it is the fault, in part, of my obstinacy. There have been times when I have been frantically distressed, and, to tell you the truth, wretchedly homesick, because my maid—a jewel of a maid—lied to me with every second breath. There have been moments when I have wished I was the daughter of a poor New England minister, living in a little white house under a couple of elms, and doing all the housework."

She had begun to speak slowly, with an air of effort; but she went on quickly, as if talking were a relief. "My marriage introduced me to people and things

which seemed to me at first very strange and then very horrible, and then, to tell the truth, very contemptible. At first I expended a great deal of sorrow and dismay and pity on it all ; but there soon came a time when I began to wonder whether it were worth one's tears. If I could tell you the eternal friendships I have seen broken, the inconsolable woes consoled, the jealousies and vanities scrambling for precedence, you would agree with me that tempers like yours and mine can understand neither such troubles nor such compensations. A year ago, while I was in the country, a friend of mine was in despair at the infidelity of her husband ; she wrote me a most dolorous letter, and on my return to Paris I went immediately to see her. A week had elapsed, and, as I had seen stranger things, I thought she might have recovered her spirits. Not at all ; she was still in despair—but at what ? At the conduct, the abandoned, shameless conduct of Madame de T. You'll imagine, of course, that Madame de T. was the lady whom my friend's husband preferred to his wife. Far from it ; he had never seen her. Who, then, was Madame de T. ? Madame de T. was cruelly devoted to M. de V. And who was M. de V. ? M. de V.—in two words, my friend was cultivating two jealousies at once. I hardly know what I said to her ; something, at any rate, that she found unpardonable, for she quite gave me up. Shortly afterward my husband proposed we should cease to live in Paris, and I gladly assented, for I believe I was falling into a state of mind that made me a detestable companion. I should have preferred to go quite into the country, into Auvergne, where my husband has a house. But to him, Paris, in some degree, is necessary, and Saint-Germain has been a sort of compromise."

"A sort of compromise !" Longmore repeated. "That's your whole life."

"It's the life of many people, of most people of quiet tastes, and it is certainly better than acute distress. One

is at a loss theoretically to defend a compromise ; but if I found a poor creature who had managed to invent one, I should think it questionable friendship to expose its weak side." Madame de Mauves had no sooner uttered these words than she smiled faintly, as if to mitigate their personal application.

"Heaven forbid that one should do that unless one has something better to offer," said Longmore. "And yet I am haunted by a vision of a life in which you should have found no compromises, for they are a perversion of natures that tend only to goodness and rectitude. As I see it, you should have found happiness serene, profound, complete ; a *femme de chambre* not a jewel perhaps, but warranted to tell but one fib a day ; a society possibly rather provincial, but (in spite of your poor opinion of mankind) a good deal of solid virtue ; jealousies and vanities very tame, and no particular iniquities and adulteries. A husband," he added after a moment—"a husband of your own faith and race and spiritual substance, who would have loved you well."

She rose to her feet, shaking her head. "You are very kind to go to the expense of visions for me. Visions are vain things ; we must make the best of the reality."

"And yet," said Longmore, provoked by what seemed the very wantonness of her patience, "the reality, if I am not mistaken, has very recently taken a shape that keenly tests your philosophy."

She seemed on the point of replying that his sympathy was too zealous ; but a couple of impatient tears in his eyes proved that it was founded on a devotion of which it was impossible to make light. "Philosophy?" she said. "I have none. Thank Heaven!" she cried, with vehemence, "I have none. I believe, Mr. Longmore," she added in a moment, "that I have nothing on earth but a conscience—it's a good time to tell you so—nothing but a dogged, obstinate, clinging conscience. Does that prove me to be indeed of your faith and race,

and have you one for which you can say as much? I don't say it in vanity, for I believe that if my conscience will prevent me from doing anything very base, it will effectually prevent me from doing anything very fine."

"I am delighted to hear it," cried Longmore. "We are made for each other. It's very certain I too shall never do anything fine. And yet I have fancied that in my case this unaccommodating organ might be blinded and gagged a while, in a fine cause, if not turned out of doors. In yours," he went on, with the same appealing irony, "is it absolutely inexpugnable?"

But she made no concession to his sarcasm. "Don't laugh at your conscience," she answered gravely; "that's the only blasphemy I know."

She had hardly spoken when she turned suddenly at an unexpected sound, and at the same moment Longmore heard a footstep in an adjacent by-path which crossed their own at a short distance from where they stood.

"It's M. de Mauves," said Euphemia directly, and moved slowly forward. Longmore, wondering how she knew it, had overtaken her by the time her husband advanced into sight. A solitary walk in the forest was a pastime to which M. de Mauves was not addicted, but he seemed on this occasion to have resorted to it with some equanimity. He was smoking a fragrant cigar, and his thumb was thrust into the arm-hole of his waistcoat, with an air of contemplative serenity. He stopped short with surprise on seeing his wife and her companion, and to Longmore his surprise seemed impertinent. He glanced rapidly from one to the other, fixed Longmore's eye sharply for a single instant, and then lifted his hat with formal politeness.

"I was not aware," he said, turning to Madame de Mauves, "that I might congratulate you on the return of Monsieur."

"You should have known it," she answered gravely, "if I had expected Mr. Longmore's return."

She had become very pale, and Longmore felt that this was a first meeting after a stormy parting. "My return was unexpected to myself," he said. "I came last evening."

M. de Mauves smiled with extreme urbanity. "It is needless for me to welcome you. Madame de Mauves knows the duties of hospitality." And with another bow he continued his walk.

Madame de Mauves and her companion returned slowly home, with few words, but, on Longmore's part at least, many thoughts. The Baron's appearance had given him an angry chill; it was a dusky cloud reabsorbing the light which had begun to shine between himself and his companion.

He watched Euphemia narrowly as they went, and wondered what she had last had to suffer. Her husband's presence had checked her disposition to talk, but nothing indicated that she had acknowledged the insulting meaning of his words. Matters were evidently at a crisis between them, and Longmore wondered vainly what it was on Euphemia's part that prevented an absolute rupture. What did she suspect?—how much did she know? To what was she resigned?—how much had she forgiven? How, above all, did she reconcile with knowledge, or with suspicion, that ineradicable tenderness of which she had just now all but assured him? "She has loved him once," Longmore said, with a sinking of the heart, "and with her to love once is to commit one's self for ever. Her husband thinks her too stiff! What would a poet call it?"

He relapsed with a kind of aching impotence into the sense of her being somehow beyond him, unattainable, immeasurable by his own fretful logic. Suddenly he gave three passionate switches in the air with his cane, which made Madame de Mauves look round. She could hardly have guessed that they meant that where ambition was so vain, it was an innocent compensation to plunge into worship.

Madame de Mauves found in her drawing-room the little elderly Frenchman, M. de Chalumeau, whom Longmore had observed a few days before on the terrace. On this occasion, too, Madame Clairin was entertaining him, but as his sister-in-law came in she surrendered her post and addressed herself to our hero. Longmore, at thirty, was still an ingenuous youth, and there was something in this lady's large coquetry which had the power of making him blush. He was surprised at finding he had not absolutely forfeited her favour by his deportment at their last interview, and a suspicion of her being prepared to approach him on another line completed his uneasiness.

"So you have returned from Brussels by way of the forest?" she said.

"I have not been to Brussels. I returned yesterday from Paris by the only way—by the train."

Madame Clairin stared and laughed. "I have never known a young man to be so fond of Saint-Germain. They generally declare it's horribly dull."

"That's not very polite to you," said Longmore, who was vexed at his blushes, and determined not to be abashed.

"Ah, what am I?" demanded Madame Clairin, swinging open her fan. "I am the dullest thing here. They have not had your success with my sister-in-law."

"It would have been very easy to have it. Madame de Mauves is kindness itself."

"To her own countrymen!"

Longmore remained silent; he hated the tone of this conversation. Madame Clairin looked at him a moment, and then turned her head and surveyed Euphemia, to whom M. de Chalumeau was serving up another epigram, which she was receiving with a slight droop of the head and her eyes absently wandering through the window. "Don't pretend to tell me," she murmured suddenly, "that you are not in love with that pretty woman."

"*Allons donc !*" cried Longmore, in the best French he had ever uttered. He rose the next minute, and took a hasty farewell.

VI.

HE allowed several days to pass without going back ; it seemed delicate to appear not to regard Madame de Mauves' frankness during their last interview as a general invitation. This cost him a great effort, for hopeless passions are not the most deferential ; and he had, moreover, a constant fear that if, as he believed, the hour of supreme explanations had come, the magic of her magnanimity might convert M. de Mauves. Vicious men, it was abundantly recorded, had been so converted as to be acceptable to God, and the something divine in Euphemia's temper would sanctify any means she should choose to employ. Her means, he kept repeating, were no business of his, and the essence of his admiration ought to be to allow her to do as she liked ; but he felt as if he should turn away into a world out of which most of the joy had departed, if she should like, after all, to see nothing more in his interest in her than might be repaid by a murmured "Thank you."

When he called again he found to his vexation that he was to run the gauntlet of Madame Clairin's officious hospitality. It was one of the first mornings of perfect summer, and the drawing-room, through the open windows, was flooded with a sweet confusion of odours and bird-notes which filled him with the hope that Madame de Mauves would come out and spend half the day in the forest. But Madame Clairin, with her hair not yet dressed, emerged like a brassy discord in a maze of melody.

At the same moment the servant returned with

Euphemia's regrets ; she was "indisposed," and was unable to see Mr. Longmore. The young man knew that he looked disappointed and that Madame Clairin was observing him, and this consciousness impelled him to give her a glance of almost aggressive frigidity. This was apparently what she desired. She wished to throw him off his balance, and, if she was not mistaken, she had the means.

"Put down your hat, Mr. Longmore," she said, "and be polite for once. You were not at all polite the other day when I asked you that friendly question about the state of your heart."

"I have no heart—to talk about," said Longmore, uncompromisingly.

"As well say you have none at all. I advise you to cultivate a little eloquence ; you may have use for it. That was not an idle question of mine ; I don't ask idle questions. For a couple of months now that you have been coming and going among us, it seems to me that you have had very few to answer of any sort."

"I have certainly been very well treated," said Longmore.

Madame Clairin was silent a moment, and then—

"Have you never felt disposed to ask any?" she demanded.

Her look, her tone, were so charged with roundabout meanings that it seemed to Longmore as if even to understand her would savour of dishonest complicity. "What is it you have to tell me?" he asked, frowning and blushing.

Madame Clairin flushed. It is rather hard, when you come bearing yourself very much as the sibyl when she came to the Roman king, to be treated as something worse than a vulgar gossip. "I might tell you, Mr. Longmore," she said, "that you have as bad a *ton* as any young man I ever met. Where have you lived—what are your ideas? I wish to call your attention to a

fact which it takes some delicacy to touch upon. You have noticed, I suppose, that my sister-in-law is not the happiest woman in the world."

Longmore assented with a gesture.

Madame Clairin looked slightly disappointed at his want of enthusiasm. Nevertheless—"You have formed, I suppose," she continued, "your conjectures on the causes of her—dissatisfaction."

"Conjecture has been superfluous. I have seen the causes—or at least a specimen of them—with my own eyes."

"I know perfectly what you mean. My brother, in a single word, is in love with another woman. I don't judge him; I don't judge my sister-in-law. I permit myself to say that in her position I would have managed otherwise. I would either have kept my husband's affection, or I would have frankly done without it. But my sister is an odd compound; I don't profess to understand her. Therefore it is, in a measure, that I appeal to you, her fellow-countryman. Of course you will be surprised at my way of looking at the matter, and I admit that it's a way in use only among people whose family traditions compel them to take a superior view of things." Madame Clairin paused, and Longmore wondered where her family traditions were going to lead her.

"Listen," she went on. "There has never been a De Mauves who has not given his wife the right to be jealous. We know our history for ages back, and the fact is established. It's a shame if you like, but it's something to have a shame with such a pedigree. Our men have been real Frenchmen, and their wives—I may say it—have been worthy of them. You may see all their portraits at our house in Auvergne; every one of them an 'injured' beauty, but not one of them hanging her head. Not one of them had the bad taste to be jealous, and yet not one in a dozen was guilty of an

escapade—not one of them was talked about. There's good sense for you ! How they managed—go and look at the dusky, faded canvases and pastels, and ask. They were femmes d'esprit ! When they had a headache, they put on a little rouge and came to supper as usual ; and when they had a heartache, they put a little rouge on their hearts. These are great traditions, and it doesn't seem to me fair that a little American bourgeoisie should come in and pretend to alter them, and should hang her photograph, with her obstinate little *air penché*, in the gallery of our shrewd fine ladies. A De Mauves must be of the old race. When she married my brother, I don't suppose she took him for a member of a *société de bonnes œuvres*. I don't say we are right ; who is right ? But we are as history has made us, and if any one is to change, it had better be my sister-in-law herself." Again Madame Clairin paused, and opened and closed her fan. "Let her conform !" she said, with amazing audacity.

Longmore's reply was ambiguous ; he simply said, "Ah !"

Madame Clairin's historical retrospect had apparently imparted an honest zeal to her indignation. "For a long time," she continued, "my sister has been taking the attitude of an injured woman, affecting a disgust with the world, and shutting herself up to read free-thinking books. I have never permitted myself any observation on her conduct, but I have quite lost patience with it. When a woman with her prettiness lets her husband stray away, she deserves her fate. I don't wish you to agree with me—on the contrary ; but I call such a woman a goose. She must have bored him to death. What has passed between them for many months needn't concern us ; what provocation my sister has had—monstrous, if you wish—what ennui my brother has suffered. It's enough that a week ago, just after you had ostensibly gone to Brussels, something happened to produce an explosion. She found a letter in his pocket—a photo-

graph—a trinket—*que sais-je ?* At any rate, the scene was terrible. I didn't listen at the keyhole, and I don't know what was said ; but I have reason to believe that my brother was called to account as I fancy none of his ancestors have ever been—even by injured mistresses !”

Longmore had leaned forward in silent attention with his elbows on his knees ; and now instinctively he dropped his face into his hands. “Ah, poor woman !” he groaned.

“Voilà !” said Madame Clairin. “You pity her.”

“Pity her ?” cried Longmore, looking up with ardent eyes and forgetting the spirit of Madame Clairin's narrative in the miserable facts. “Don't you ?”

“A little. But I am not acting sentimentally ; I am acting politically. We have always been a political family. I wish to arrange things—to see my brother free to do as he chooses—to see Euphemia contented. Do you understand me ?”

“Very well, I think. You are the most immoral person I have lately had the privilege of conversing with.”

Madame Clairin shrugged her shoulders. “Possibly. When was there a great politician who was not immoral ?”

“Ah no,” said Longmore in the same tone. “You are too superficial to be a great politician. You don't begin to know anything about Madame de Mauves.”

Madame Clairin inclined her head to one side, eyed Longmore sharply, mused a moment, and then smiled with an excellent imitation of intelligent compassion. “It's not in my interest to contradict you.”

“It would be in your interest to learn, Madame Clairin,” the young man went on with unceremonious candour, “what honest men most admire in a woman—and to recognise it when you see it.”

Longmore certainly did injustice to her talents for diplomacy, for she covered her natural annoyance at this

sally with a pretty piece of irony. "So you *are* in love!" she quietly exclaimed.

Longmore was silent a while. "I wonder if you would understand me," he said at last, "if I were to tell you that I have for Madame de Mauves the most devoted friendship?"

"You underrate my intelligence. But in that case you ought to exert your influence to put an end to these painful domestic scenes."

"Do you suppose that she talks to me about her domestic scenes?" cried Longmore.

Madame Clairin stared. "Then your friendship isn't returned?" And as Longmore turned away, shaking his head—"Now, at least," she added, "she will have something to tell you. I happen to know the upshot of my brother's last interview with his wife." Longmore rose to his feet as a sort of protest against the indelicacy of the position in which he found himself; but all that made him tender made him curious, and she caught in his averted eyes an expression which prompted her to strike her blow. "My brother is monstrously in love with a certain person in Paris; of course he ought not to be; but he wouldn't be my brother if he were not. It was this irregular passion that dictated his words. 'Listen to me, Madame,' he cried at last; 'let us live like people who understand life! It is unpleasant to be forced to say such things outright, but you have a way of bringing one down to the rudiments. I am faithless, I am heartless, I am brutal, I am everything horrible—it's understood. Take your revenge, console yourself; you are too pretty a woman to have anything to complain of. Here is a handsome young man sighing himself into a consumption for you. Listen to the poor fellow, and you will find that virtue is none the less becoming for being good-natured. You will see that it's not, after all, such a doleful world, and that there is even an advantage in having the most impudent of husbands.'" Madame

Clairin paused ; Longmore had turned very pale. " You may believe it," she said ; " the speech took place in my presence ; things were done in order. And now, Mr. Longmore"—this with a smile which he was too troubled at the moment to appreciate, but which he remembered later with a kind of awe—" we count upon you !"

" He said this to her, face to face, as you say it to me now ?" Longmore asked slowly, after a silence.

" Word for word, and with the greatest politeness."

" And Madame de Mauves—what did she say ?"

Madame Clairin smiled again. " To such a speech as that a woman says—nothing. She had been sitting with a piece of needlework, and I think she had not seen her husband since their quarrel the day before. He came in with the gravity of an ambassador, and I am sure that when he made his *demande en mariage* his manner was not more respectful. He only wanted white gloves !" said Madame Clairin. " Euphemia sat silent a few moments, drawing her stitches, and then without a word, without a glance, she walked out of the room. It was just what she should have done !"

" Yes," Longmore repeated, " it was just what she should have done."

" And I, left alone with my brother, do you know what I said ?"

Longmore shook his head. "*Mauvais sujet !*" he suggested.

" ' You have done me the honour,' I said, ' to take this step in my presence. I don't pretend to qualify it. You know what you are about, and it's your own affair. But you may confide in my discretion.' Do you think he has had reason to complain of it ?" She received no answer ; Longmore was slowly turning away and passing his gloves mechanically round the band of his hat. " I hope," she cried, " you are not going to start for Brussels !"

Plainly, Longmore was deeply disturbed, and Madame Clairin might congratulate herself on the success of her plea for old-fashioned manners. And yet there was something that left her more puzzled than satisfied in the reflective tone with which he answered, "No, I shall remain here for the present." The processes of his mind seemed provokingly subterranean, and she could have fancied for a moment that he was linked with her sister in some monstrous conspiracy of asceticism.

"Come this evening," she boldly resumed. "The rest will take care of itself. Meanwhile, I shall take the liberty of telling my sister-in-law that I have repeated—in short, that I have put you *au fait*."

Longmore started and coloured, and she hardly knew whether he were going to assent or to demur. "Tell her what you please. Nothing you can tell her will affect her conduct."

"Voyons! Do you mean to tell me that a woman, young, pretty, sentimental, neglected—insulted, if you will—? I see you don't believe it. Believe simply in your own opportunity! But for Heaven's sake, if it is to lead anywhere, don't come back with that *visage de croquemort*. You look as if you were going to bury your heart—not to offer it to a pretty woman. You are much better when you smile—you are very nice then. Come, do yourself justice."

"Yes," he said, "I must do myself justice." And abruptly, with a bow, he took his departure.

VII.

HE felt, when he found himself unobserved in the open air, that he must plunge into violent action, walk fast and far, and defer the opportunity for thought. He

strode away into the forest, swinging his cane, throwing back his head, gazing away into the verdurous vistas, and following the road without a purpose. He felt immensely excited, but he could hardly have said whether his emotion was a pain or a joy. It was joyous as all increase of freedom is joyous; something seemed to have been cleared out of his path; his destiny appeared to have rounded a cape and brought him into sight of an open sea. But his freedom resolved itself somehow into the need of despising all mankind, with a single exception; and the fact of Madame de Mauves inhabiting a planet contaminated by the presence of this baser multitude kept his elation from seeming a pledge of ideal bliss.

But she was there, and circumstances now forced them to be intimate. She had ceased to have what men call a secret for him, and this fact itself brought with it a sort of rapture. He had no prevision that he should "profit," in the vulgar sense, by the extraordinary position into which they had been thrown; it might be but a cruel trick of destiny to make hope a harsher mockery and renunciation a keener suffering. But above all this rose the conviction that she could do nothing that would not deepen his admiration.

It was this feeling that circumstance—odious as it was in itself—was to force the beauty of her character into more perfect relief, that made him stride along as if he were celebrating a kind of spiritual festival. He rambled at random for a couple of hours, and found at last that he had left the forest behind him and had wandered into an unfamiliar region. It was a perfectly rural scene, and the still summer day gave it a charm for which its meagre elements but half accounted.

Longmore thought he had never seen anything so characteristically French; all the French novels seemed to have described it, all the French landscapists to have painted it. The fields and trees were of a cool metallic

green ; the grass looked as if it might stain your trousers, and the foliage your hands. The clear light had a sort of mild grayness ; the sunbeams were of silver rather than gold. A great red-roofed, high-stacked farmhouse, with whitewashed walls and a straggling yard, surveyed the high road on one side, from behind a transparent curtain of poplars. A narrow stream, half choked with emerald rushes and edged with gray aspens, occupied the opposite quarter. The meadows rolled and sloped away gently to the low horizon, which was barely concealed by the continuous line of clipped and marshalled trees. The prospect was not rich, but it had a frank homeliness which touched the young man's fancy. It was full of light atmosphere and diffused sunshine, and if it was prosaic, it was soothing.

Longmore was disposed to walk further, and he advanced along the road beneath the poplars. In twenty minutes he came to a village which straggled away to the right, among orchards and *potagers*. On the left, at a stone's throw from the road, stood a little pink-faced inn, which reminded him that he had not breakfasted, having left home with a prevision of hospitality from Madame de Mauves. In the inn he found a brick-tiled parlour and a hostess in sabots and a white cap, whom, over the omelette she speedily served him—borrowing license from the bottle of sound red wine which accompanied it—he assured that she was a true artist. To reward his compliment, she invited him to smoke his cigar in her little garden behind the house.

Here he found a *tonnelle* and a view of ripening crops, stretching down to the stream. The *tonnelle* was rather close, and he preferred to lounge on a bench against the pink wall, in the sun, which was not too hot. Here, as he rested and gazed and mused, he fell into a train of thought which, in an indefinable fashion, was a soft influence from the scene about him. His heart, which had been beating fast for the past three hours, gradually

checked its pulses and left him looking at life with a rather more level gaze. The homely tavern sounds coming out through the open windows, the sunny stillness of the fields and crops, which covered so much vigorous natural life, suggested very little that was transcendental, had very little to say about renunciation—nothing at all about spiritual zeal. They seemed to utter a message from plain ripe nature, to express the unperverted reality of things, to say that the common lot is not brilliantly amusing, and that the part of wisdom is to grasp frankly at experience, lest you miss it altogether. What reason there was for his falling a-wondering after this whether a deeply wounded heart might be soothed and healed by such a scene, it would be difficult to explain; certain it is that, as he sat there, he had a waking dream of an unhappy woman strolling by the slow-flowing stream before him, and pulling down the fruit-laden boughs in the orchards. He mused and mused, and at last found himself feeling angry that he could not somehow think worse of Madame de Mauves—or at any rate think otherwise. He could fairly claim that in a sentimental way he asked very little of life—he made modest demands on passion; why then should his only passion be born to ill-fortune? why should his first—his last—glimpse of positive happiness be so indissolubly linked with renunciation?

It is perhaps because, like many spirits of the same stock, he had in his composition a lurking principle of asceticism to whose authority he had ever paid an unquestioning respect, that he now felt all the vehemence of rebellion. To renounce—to renounce again—to renounce for ever—was this all that youth and longing and resolve were meant for? Was experience to be muffled and mutilated, like an indecent picture? Was a man to sit and deliberately condemn his future to be the blank memory of a regret, rather than the long reverberation of a joy? Sacrifice? The word was a trap for

minds muddled by fear, an ignoble refuge of weakness. To insist now seemed not to dare, but simply to be, to live on possible terms.

His hostess came out to hang a cloth to dry on the hedge, and, though her guest was sitting quietly enough, she seemed to see in his kindled eyes a flattering testimony to the quality of her wine.

As she turned back into the house she was met by a young man whom Longmore observed in spite of his pre-occupation. He was evidently a member of that jovial fraternity of artists whose very shabbiness has an affinity with the element of picturesqueness and unexpectedness in life—that element which provokes so much unformulated envy among people foredoomed to be respectable.

Longmore was struck first with his looking like a very clever man, and then with his looking like a very happy one. The combination, as it was expressed in his face, might have arrested the attention of even a less cynical philosopher. He had a slouched hat and a blonde beard, a light easel under one arm, and an unfinished sketch in oils under the other.

He stopped and stood talking for some moments to the landlady, with a peculiarly good-humoured smile. They were discussing the possibilities of dinner; the hostess enumerated some very savoury ones, and he nodded briskly, assenting to everything. It couldn't be, Longmore thought, that he found such soft contentment in the prospect of lamb-chops and spinach and a *croûte aux fruits*. When the dinner had been ordered he turned up his sketch, and the good woman fell a-wondering and looking away at the spot by the stream-side where he had made it.

Was it his work, Longmore wondered, that made him so happy? Was a strong talent the best thing in the world? The landlady went back to her kitchen, and the young painter stood, as if he were waiting for something, beside the gate which opened upon the path

across the fields. Longmore sat brooding and asking himself whether it was better to cultivate one of the arts than to cultivate one of the passions. Before he had answered the question the painter had grown tired of waiting. He picked up a pebble, tossed it lightly into an upper window, and called, "Claudine !",

Claudine appeared ; Longmore heard her at the window, bidding the young man to have patience. "But I am losing my light," he said ; "I must have my shadows in the same place as yesterday."

"Go without me, then," Claudine answered ; "I will join you in ten minutes." Her voice was fresh and young ; it seemed to say to Longmore that she was as happy as her companion.

"Don't forget the Chénier," cried the young man ; and turning away, he passed out of the gate and followed the path across the fields until he disappeared among the trees by the side of the stream. Who was Claudine ? Longmore vaguely wondered ; and was she as pretty as her voice ? Before long he had a chance to satisfy himself ; she came out of the house with her hat and parasol, prepared to follow her companion. She had on a pink muslin dress and a little white hat, and she was as pretty as a Frenchwoman needs to be to be pleasing. She had a clear brown skin and a bright dark eye, and a step which seemed to keep time to some slow music, heard only by herself. Her hands were encumbered with various articles which she seemed to intend to carry with her. In one arm she held her parasol and a large roll of needlework, and in the other a shawl and a heavy white umbrella, such as painters use for sketching. Meanwhile she was trying to thrust into her pocket a paper-covered volume which Longmore saw to be the Poems of André Chénier ; but in the effort she dropped the large umbrella, and uttered a half-smiling exclamation of disgust. Longmore stepped forward and picked up the umbrella, and as she, protesting her gratitude,

put out her hand to take it, it seemed to him that she was unbecomingly overburdened.

"You have too much to carry," he said ; "you must let me help you."

"You are very good, Monsieur," she answered. "My husband always forgets something. He can do nothing without his umbrella. He is *d'une étourderie*——"

"You must allow me to carry the umbrella," Longmore said ; "it's too heavy for a lady."

She assented, after many compliments to his politeness ; and he walked by her side into the meadow. She went lightly and rapidly, picking her steps and glancing forward to catch a glimpse of her husband. She was graceful, she was charming, she had an air of decision and yet of sweetness, and it seemed to Longmore that a young artist would work none the worse for having her seated at his side reading Chénier's iambics. They were newly married, he supposed, and evidently their path of life had none of the mocking crookedness of some others. They asked little ; but what need one ask more than such quiet summer days, with the creature one loves, by a shady stream, with art and books and a wide unshadowed horizon ? To spend such a morning, to stroll back to dinner in the red-tiled parlour of the inn, to ramble away again as the sun got low—all this was a vision of bliss which floated before him only to torture him with a sense of the impossible. All Frenchwomen are not coquettes, he remarked, as he kept pace with his companion. She uttered a word now and then, for politeness' sake, but she never looked at him, and seemed not in the least to care that he was a well-favoured young man. She cared for nothing but the young artist in the shabby coat and the slouched hat, and for discovering where he had set up his easel.

This was soon done. He was encamped under the trees, close to the stream, and, in the diffused green shade of the little wood, seemed to be in no immediate need of

his umbrella. He received a vivacious rebuke, however, for forgetting it, and was informed of what he owed to Longmore's complaisance. He was duly grateful; he thanked our hero warmly, and offered him a seat on the grass. But Longmore felt like a marplot, and lingered only long enough to glance at the young man's sketch, and to see it was a very clever rendering of the silvery stream and the vivid green rushes. The young wife had spread her shawl on the grass at the base of a tree, and meant to seat herself when Longmore had gone, and murmur Chénier's verses to the music of the gurgling river. Longmore looked a while from one to the other, barely stifled a sigh, bade them good morning, and took his departure.

He knew neither where to go nor what to do; he seemed afloat on the sea of ineffectual longing. He strolled slowly back to the inn, and in the doorway met the landlady coming back from the butcher's with the lamb-chops for the dinner of her lodgers.

"Monsieur has made the acquaintance of the *dame* of our young painter," she said with a broad smile—a smile too broad for malicious meanings. "Monsieur has perhaps seen the young man's picture. It appears that he has a great deal of talent."

"His picture was very pretty," said Longmore, "but his *dame* was prettier still."

"She's a very nice little woman; but I pity her all the more."

"I don't see why she's to be pitied," said Longmore; "they seem a very happy couple."

The landlady gave a knowing nod.

"Don't trust to it, Monsieur! Those artists—*ça n'a pas de principes!* From one day to another he can plant her there! I know them, *allez*. I have had them here very often; one year with one, another year with another."

Longmore was puzzled for a moment. Then, "You mean she is not his wife?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders. "What shall I tell you? They are not *des hommes sérieux*, those gentlemen! They don't engage themselves for an eternity. It's none of my business, and I have no wish to speak ill of Madame. She's a very nice little woman, and she loves her *jeune homme* to distraction."

"Who is she?" asked Longmore. "What do you know about her?"

"Nothing for certain; but it's my belief that she's better than he. I have even gone so far as to believe that she's a lady—a true lady—and that she has given up a great many things for him. I do the best I can for them, but I don't believe she has been obliged all her life to content herself with a dinner of two courses." And she turned over her lamb-chops tenderly, as if to say that though a good cook could imagine better things, yet if you could have but one course, lamb-chops had much in their favour. "I shall cook them with bread-crumbs. *Voilà les femmes, Monsieur!*"

Longmore turned away with the feeling that women were indeed a measureless mystery, and that it was hard to say whether there was greater beauty in their strength or in their weakness. He walked back to Saint-Germain more slowly than he had come, with less philosophic resignation to any event, and more of the urgent egotism of the passion which philosophers call the supremely selfish one. Every now and then the episode of the happy young painter and the charming woman who had given up a great many things for him rose vividly in his mind, and seemed to mock his moral unrest like some obtrusive vision of unattainable bliss.

The landlady's gossip had cast no shadow on its brightness; her voice seemed that of the vulgar chorus of the uninitiated, which stands always ready with its gross prose rendering of the inspired passages of human action. Was it possible a man could take *that* from a woman—take all that lent lightness to that other woman's footstep and

intensity to her glance—and not give her the absolute certainty of a devotion as unalterable as the process of the sun? Was it possible that such a rapturous union had the seeds of trouble—that the charm of such a perfect accord could be broken by anything but death? Longmore felt an immense desire to cry out a thousand times “No!” for it seemed to him at last that he was somehow spiritually the same as the young painter, and that the latter’s companion had the soul of Euphemia.

The heat of the sun, as he walked along, became oppressive, and when he re-entered the forest he turned aside into the deepest shade he could find, and stretched himself on the mossy ground at the foot of a great beech. He lay for a while staring up into the verdurous dusk overhead, and trying to conceive Madame de Mauves hastening towards some quiet stream-side where he waited, as he had seen that trusting creature do an hour before. It would be hard to say how well he succeeded; but the effort soothed him rather than excited him, and as he had had a good deal both of moral and physical fatigue, he sank at last into a quiet sleep.

While he slept he had a strange, vivid dream. He seemed to be in a wood, very much like the one on which his eyes had lately closed; but the wood was divided by the murmuring stream he had left an hour before. He was walking up and down, he thought, restlessly and in intense expectation of some momentous event. Suddenly, at a distance, through the trees, he saw the gleam of a woman’s dress, and hurried forward to meet her. As he advanced he recognised her, but he saw at the same time that she was on the opposite bank of the river. She seemed at first not to notice him, but when they were opposite each other she stopped and looked at him very gravely and pityingly. She made him no motion that he should cross the stream, but he wished greatly to stand by her side. He knew the water was deep, and it seemed to him that he knew that he should have to plunge, and

that he feared that when he rose to the surface she would have disappeared. Nevertheless, he was going to plunge, when a boat turned into the current from above and came swiftly towards them, guided by an oarsman who was sitting so that they could not see his face. He brought the boat to the bank where Longmore stood; the latter stepped in, and with a few strokes they touched the opposite shore. Longmore got out, and, though he was sure he had crossed the stream, Madame de Mauves was not there. He turned with a kind of agony and saw that now she was on the other bank—the one he had left. She gave him a grave, silent glance, and walked away up the stream. The boat and the boatman resumed their course, but after going a short distance they stopped, and the boatman turned back and looked at the still divided couple. Then Longmore recognised him—just as he had recognised him a few days before at the restaurant in the Bois de Boulogne.

VIII.

HE must have slept some time after he ceased dreaming, for he had no immediate memory of his dream. It came back to him later, after he had roused himself and had walked nearly home. No great ingenuity was needed to make it seem a rather striking allegory, and it haunted and oppressed him for the rest of the day. He took refuge, however, in his quickened conviction that the only sound policy in life is to grasp unsparingly at happiness; and it seemed no more than one of the vigorous measures dictated by such a policy, to return that evening to Madame de Mauves. And yet when he had decided to do so, and had carefully dressed himself, he felt an irresistible nervous tremor which made it easier to linger at his open window, wondering, with a strange mixture

of dread and desire, whether Madame Clairin had told her sister-in-law what she had told him. His presence now might be simply a gratuitous annoyance; and yet his absence might seem to imply that it was in the power of circumstances to make them ashamed to meet each other's eyes. He sat a long time with his head in his hands, lost in a painful confusion of hopes and questionings. He felt at moments as if he could throttle Madame Clairin, and yet he could not help asking himself whether it were not possible that she had done him a service. It was late when he left the hotel, and as he entered the gate of the other house his heart was beating so fast that he was sure his voice would show it.

The servant ushered him into the drawing-room, which was empty, with the lamp burning low. But the long windows were open, and their light curtains swaying in a soft warm wind, so that Longmore immediately stepped out upon the terrace. There he found Madame de Mauves alone, slowly pacing up and down. She was dressed in white, very simply, and her hair was arranged, not as she usually wore it, but in a single loose coil, like that of a person unprepared for company.

She stopped when she saw Longmore, seemed slightly startled, uttered an exclamation, and stood waiting for him to speak. He looked at her, tried to say something, but found no words. He knew it was awkward, it was offensive, to stand gazing at her; but he could not say what was suitable, and he dared not say what he wished.

Her face was indistinct in the dim light, but he could see that her eyes were fixed on him, and he wondered what they expressed. Did they warn him, did they plead, or did they confess to a sense of provocation? For an instant his head swam; he felt as if it would make all things clear to stride forward and fold her in his arms. But a moment later he was still standing looking at her; he had not moved; he knew that she had spoken, but he had not understood her.

"You were here this morning," she continued ; and now, slowly, the meaning of her words came to him. "I had a bad headache and had to shut myself up." She spoke in her usual voice.

Longmore mastered his agitation, and answered her without betraying himself. "I hope you are better now."

"Yes, thank you, I am better—much better."

He was silent a moment, and she moved away to a chair and seated herself. After a pause he followed her and stood before her, leaning against the balustrade of the terrace. "I hoped you might have been able to come out for the morning into the forest. I went alone ; it was a lovely day, and I took a long walk."

"It was a lovely day," she said, absently, and sat with her eyes lowered, slowly opening and closing her fan. Longmore, as he watched her, felt more and more sure that her sister-in-law had seen her since her interview with him ; that her attitude towards him was changed. It was this same something that chilled the ardour with which he had come, or at least converted the dozen passionate speeches that kept rising to his lips into a kind of reverential silence. No, certainly, he could not clasp her to his arms now, any more than some antique worshipper could have clasped the marble statue in his temple. But Longmore's statue spoke at last, with a full human voice, and even with a shade of human hesitation. She looked up, and it seemed to him that her eyes shone through the dusk.

"I am very glad you came this evening," she said. "I have a particular reason for being glad. I half expected you, and yet I thought it possible you might not come."

"As I have been feeling all day," Longmore answered, "it was impossible I should not come. I have spent the day in thinking of you."

She made no immediate reply, but continued to open

and close her fan thoughtfully. At last—"I have something to say to you," she said abruptly. "I want you to know to a certainty that I have a very high opinion of you." Longmore started and shifted his position. To what was she coming? But he said nothing, and she went on—

"I take a great interest in you; there is no reason why I should not say it—I have a great friendship for you."

He began to laugh; he hardly knew why, unless that this seemed the very mockery of coldness. But she continued without heeding him—

"You know, I suppose, that a great disappointment always implies a great confidence—a great hope?"

"I have hoped," he said, "hoped strongly; but doubtless never rationally enough to have a right to bemoan my disappointment."

"You do yourself injustice. I have such confidence in your reason that I should be greatly disappointed if I were to find it wanting."

"I really almost believe that you are amusing yourself at my expense," cried Longmore. "My reason? Reason is a mere word! The only reality in the world is the thing one *feels*!"

She rose to her feet and looked at him gravely. His eyes by this time were accustomed to the imperfect light, and he could see that her look was reproachful, and yet that it was beseechingly kind. She shook her head impatiently, and laid her fan upon his arm with a strong pressure.

"If that were so, it would be a weary world. I know what you feel, however, nearly enough. You needn't try to express it. It's enough that it gives me the right to ask a favour of you—to make an urgent, a solemn request."

"Make it; I listen."

"*Don't disappoint me.* If you don't understand me

now, you will to-morrow, or very soon. When I said just now that I had a very high opinion of you, I meant it very seriously. It was not a vain compliment. I believe that there is no appeal one may make to your generosity which can remain long unanswered. If this were to happen—if I were to find you selfish where I thought you generous, narrow where I thought you large”—and she spoke slowly, with her voice lingering with emphasis on each of these words—“vulgar where I thought you rare—I should think worse of human nature. I should suffer—I should suffer keenly. I should say to myself in the dull days of the future, ‘There was one man who might have done so and so; and he, too, failed.’ But, this shall not be. You have made too good an impression on me not to make the very best. If you wish to please me for ever, there is a way.”

She was standing close to him, with her dress touching him, her eyes fixed on his. As she went on her manner grew strangely intense, and she had the singular appearance of a woman preaching reason with a kind of passion. Longmore was confused, dazzled, almost bewildered. The intention of her words was all remonstrance, refusal, dismissal; but her presence there, so close, so urgent, so personal, seemed a distracting contradiction of it. She had never been so lovely. In her white dress, with her pale face and deeply-lighted eyes, she seemed the very spirit of the summer night. When she had ceased speaking she drew a long breath; Longmore felt it on his cheek, and it stirred in his whole being a sudden rapturous conjecture. Were her words in their soft severity a mere delusive spell, meant to throw into relief her almost ghostly beauty, and was this the only truth, the only reality, the only law?

He closed his eyes and felt that she was watching him, not without pain and perplexity herself. He looked at her again, met her own eyes, and saw a tear in each of them. Then this last suggestion of his desire seemed

to die away with a stifled murmur, and her beauty, more and more radiant in the darkness, rose before him as a symbol of something vague, which was yet more beautiful than itself.

"I may understand you to-morrow," he said, "but I don't understand you now."

"And yet I took counsel with myself to-day and asked myself how I had best speak to you. On one side I might have refused to see you at all." Longmore made a violent movement, and she added—"In that case I should have written to you. I might see you, I thought, and simply say to you that there were excellent reasons why we should part, and that I begged this visit should be your last. This I inclined to do; what made me decide otherwise was—simply friendship! I said to myself that I should be glad to remember in future days, not that I had dismissed you, but that you had gone away out of the fulness of your own wisdom."

"The fulness—the fulness!" cried Longmore.

"I am prepared, if necessary," Madame de Mauves continued after a pause, "to fall back upon my strict right. But, as I said before, I shall be greatly disappointed if I am obliged to do that."

"When I hear you say that," Longmore answered, "I feel so angry, so horribly irritated, that I wonder I don't leave you without more words."

"If you should go away in anger, this idea of mine about our parting would be but half realised. No, I don't want to think of you as angry; I don't want even to think of you as making a serious sacrifice. I want to think of you as——"

"As a creature who never has existed—who never can exist! A creature who knew you without loving you—who left you without regretting you!"

She turned impatiently away and walked to the other end of the terrace. When she came back, he saw that her impatience had become a cold sternness. She stood

before him again, looking at him from head to foot, in deep reproachfulness, almost in scorn. Beneath her glance he felt a kind of shame. He coloured; she observed it and withheld something she was about to say. She turned away again, walked to the other end of the terrace, and stood there looking away into the garden. It seemed to him that she had guessed he understood her, and slowly—slowly—half as the fruit of his vague self-reproach—he did understand her. She was giving him a chance to do gallantly what it seemed unworthy of both of them he should do meanly.

She liked him, she must have liked him greatly, to wish so to spare him, to go to the trouble of conceiving an ideal of conduct for him. With this sense of her friendship—her strong friendship she had just called it—Longmore's soul rose with a new flight, and suddenly felt itself breathing a clearer air. The words ceased to seem a mere bribe to his ardour; they were charged with ardour themselves; they were a present happiness. He moved rapidly towards her with a feeling that this was something he might immediately enjoy.

They were separated by two-thirds of the length of the terrace, and he had to pass the drawing-room window. As he did so he started with an exclamation. Madame Clairin stood posted there, watching him. Conscious, apparently, that she might be suspected of eavesdropping, she stepped forward with a smile and looked from Longmore to his hostess.

"Such a *tête-à-tête* as that," she said, "one owes no apology for interrupting. One ought to come in for good manners."

Madame de Mauves turned round, but she answered nothing. She looked straight at Longmore, and her eyes had extraordinary eloquence. He was not exactly sure, indeed, what she meant them to say; but they seemed to say plainly something of this kind: "Call it what you will, what you have to urge upon me is the

thing which this woman can best conceive. What I ask of you is something she cannot !” They seemed, somehow, to beg him to suffer her to be herself, and to intimate that that self was as little as possible like Madame Clairin. He felt an immense answering desire not to do anything which would seem natural to this lady. He had laid his hat and stick on the parapet of the terrace. He took them up, offered his hand to Madame de Mauves with a simple good-night, bowed silently to Madame Clairin, and departed.

IX.

HE went home, and without lighting his candle flung himself on his bed. But he got no sleep till morning ; he lay hour after hour tossing, thinking, wondering ; his mind had never been so active. It seemed to him that Euphemia had given him in those last moments an inspiring commission, and that she had expressed herself almost as largely as if she had listened assentingly to an assurance of his love. It was neither easy nor delightful thoroughly to understand her ; but little by little her perfect meaning sank into his mind, and soothed it with a sense of opportunity which somehow stifled his sense of loss. For, to begin with, she meant that she could love him in no degree or contingency, in no imaginable future. This was absolute ; he felt that he could alter it no more than he could pull down the constellations he lay gazing at through his open window. He wondered what it was, in the background of her life, that she had so attached herself to. A sense of duty unquenchable to the end ? A love that no outrage could stifle ? “ Good heavens ! ” he thought, “ is the world so rich in the purest pearls of passion that such tenderness as that can be wasted for

ever—poured away without a sigh into bottomless darkness?” Had she, in spite of the detestable present, some precious memory which contained the germ of a shrinking hope? Was she prepared to submit to everything and yet to believe? Was it strength, was it weakness, was it a vulgar fear, was it conviction, conscience, constancy?

Longmore sank back with a sigh, and an oppressive feeling that it was vain to guess at such a woman's motives. He only felt that those of Madame de Mauves were buried deep in her soul, and that they must be of the noblest, and contain nothing base. He had a dim, overwhelming sense of a sort of invulnerable constancy being the supreme law of her character—a constancy which still found a foothold among crumbling ruins. “She has loved once,” he said to himself as he rose and wandered to his window; “that is for ever. Yes, yes—if she loved again she would be *common*.” He stood for a long time looking out into the starlit silence of the town and forest, and thinking of what life would have been if his constancy had met hers before this had happened. But life was this, now, and he must live. It was living keenly to stand there with such a request from such a woman still ringing in one's ears. He was not to disappoint her, he was to justify a conception which it had beguiled her weariness to shape. Longmore's imagination expanded; he threw back his head and seemed to be looking for Madame de Mauves' conception among the blinking, mocking stars. But it came to him rather on the mild night-wind, wandering in over the house-tops which covered the rest of so many heavy human hearts. What she asked, he felt that she was asking not for her own sake (she feared nothing, she needed nothing), but for that of his own happiness and his own character. He must assent to destiny. Why else was he young and strong, intelligent and resolute? He must not give it to her to reproach him with thinking

that she had a moment's attention for his love—to plead, to argue, to break off in bitterness ; he must see everything from above, her indifference and his own ardour ; he must prove his strength, he must do the handsome thing ; he must decide that the handsome thing was to submit to the inevitable, to be supremely delicate, to spare her all pain, to stifle his passion, to ask no compensation, to depart without delay, and try to believe that wisdom is its own reward. All this, neither more nor less, it was a matter of friendship with Madame de Mauves to expect of him. And what should he gain by it ? He should have pleased her ! . . . He flung himself on his bed again, fell asleep at last, and slept till morning.

Before noon the next day he had made up his mind that he would leave Saint-Germain at once. It seemed easier to leave without seeing her, and yet if he might ask a grain of “compensation,” it would be five minutes face to face with her. He passed a restless day. Wherever he went he seemed to see her standing before him in the dusky halo of evening, and looking at him with an air of still negation more intoxicating than the most passionate self-surrender. He must certainly go, and yet it was hideously hard. He compromised, and went to Paris to spend the rest of the day. He strolled along the Boulevards and looked at the shops, sat a while in the Tuileries gardens, and looked at the shabby unfortunates for whom this only was nature and summer ; but simply felt, as a result of it all, that it was a very dusty, dreary, lonely world, into which Madame de Mauves was turning him away.

In a sombre mood he made his way back to the Boulevards, and sat down at a table on the great plain of hot asphalt, before a *café*. Night came on, the lamps were lighted, the tables near him found occupants, and Paris began to wear that peculiar evening look of hers which seems to say, in the flare of windows and theatre doors, and the

muffled rumble of swift-rolling carriages, that this is no world for you unless you have your pockets lined and your scruples drugged. Longmore, however, had neither scruples nor desires ; he looked at the swarming city for the first time with an easy sense of repaying its indifference. Before long a carriage drove up to the pavement directly in front of him, and remained standing for several minutes without its occupant descending. It was one of those neat plain coupés, drawn by a single powerful horse, in which one is apt to imagine a pale handsome woman, buried among silk cushions, and yawning as she sees the gas-lamps glittering in the gutters. At last the door opened and out stepped M. de Mauves. He stopped and leaned on the window for some time, talking in an excited manner to a person within. At last he gave a nod, and the carriage rolled away. He stood swinging his cane, and looking up and down the Boulevard, with the air of a man fumbling, as one may say, with the loose change of time. He turned towards the café, and was apparently, for want of anything better worth his attention, about to seat himself at one of the tables, when he perceived Longmore. He wavered an instant, and then, without a change in his nonchalant gait, strolled towards him with a bow and a vague smile.

It was the first time they had met since their encounter in the forest after Longmore's false start for Brussels. Madame Clairin's revelations, as we may call them, had not made the Baron especially present to his mind ; he had another office for his emotions than disgust. But as M. de Mauves came towards him he felt deep in his heart that he abhorred him. He noticed, however, for the first time, a shadow upon the Baron's cool placidity, and his delight at finding that somewhere at last the shoe pinched *him*, mingled with his impulse to be as exasperatingly impenetrable as possible, enabled him to return the other's greeting with all his own self-possession.

M. de Mauves sat down, and the two men looked at each other across the table, exchanging formal greetings which did little to make their mutual scrutiny seem gracious. Longmore had no reason to suppose that the Baron knew of his sister's intimations. He was sure that M. de Mauves cared very little about his opinions, and yet he had a sense that there was that in his eyes which would have made the Baron change colour if keener suspicion had helped him to read it. M. de Mauves did not change colour, but he looked at Longmore with a half-defiant intentness which betrayed at once an irritating memory of the episode in the Bois de Boulogne, and such vigilant curiosity as was natural to a gentleman who had entrusted his "honour" to another gentleman's magnanimity—or to his artlessness.

It would appear that Longmore seemed to the Baron to possess these virtues in rather scantier measure than a few days before; for the cloud deepened on his face, and he turned away and frowned as he lighted a cigar.

The person in the coupé, Longmore thought, whether or no the same person as the heroine of the episode of the Bois de Boulogne, was not a source of unalloyed delight. Longmore had dark blue eyes of admirable lucidity—truth-telling eyes which had in his childhood always made his harshest taskmasters smile at his primitive fibs. An observer watching the two men, and knowing something of their relations, would certainly have said that what he saw in those eyes must not a little have puzzled and tormented M. de Mauves. They judged him, they mocked him, they eluded him, they threatened him, they triumphed over him, they treated him as no pair of eyes had ever treated him. The Baron's scheme had been to make no one happy but himself, and here was Longmore already, if looks were to be trusted, primed for an enterprise more inspiring than the finest of his own achievements. Was this

candid young barbarian but a *faux bonhomme* after all? He had puzzled the Baron before, and this was once too often.

M. de Mauves hated to seem preoccupied, and he took up the evening paper to help himself to look indifferent. As he glanced over it he uttered some cold commonplace on the political situation, which gave Longmore a fair opportunity of replying by an ironical sally, which made him seem for the moment aggressively at his ease. And yet our hero was far from being master of the situation. The Baron's ill-humour did him good, so far as it pointed to a want of harmony with the lady in the coupé; but it disturbed him sorely, as he began to suspect that it possibly meant jealousy of himself. It passed through his mind that jealousy is a passion with a double face, and that in some of its moods it bears a plausible likeness to affection. It recurred to him painfully that the Baron might grow ashamed of his political compact with his wife, and he felt that it would be far more tolerable in the future to think of his continued turpitude than of his repentance. The two men sat for half an hour exchanging stunted small-talk, the Baron feeling a nervous need of playing the spy, and Longmore indulging a ferocious relish of his discomfort. These thin amenities were interrupted, however, by the arrival of a friend of M. de Mauves—a tall, pale, consumptive-looking dandy, who filled the air with the odour of heliotrope. He looked up and down the Boulevard wearily, examined the Baron's toilet from head to foot, then surveyed his own in the same fashion, and at last announced languidly that the Duchess was in town! M. de Mauves must come with him to call; she had abused him dreadfully a couple of evenings before—a sure sign she wanted to see him.

“I depend upon you,” said M. de Mauves' friend with an infantine drawl, “to put her *en train*.”

M. de Mauves resisted, and protested that he was *d'une humeur massacrant*e; but at last he allowed himself

to be drawn to his feet, and stood looking awkwardly—awkwardly for M. de Mauves—at Longmore. “You will excuse me,” he said drily; “you, too, probably have occupation for the evening?”

“None but to catch my train,” Longmore answered, looking at his watch.

“Ah, you go back to Saint-Germain?”

“In half an hour.”

M. de Mauves seemed on the point of disengaging himself from his companion’s arm, which was locked in his own; but on the latter uttering some persuasive murmur, he lifted his hat stiffly and turned away.

Longmore the next day wandered off to the terrace, to try and beguile the restlessness with which he waited for evening; for he wished to see Madame de Mauves for the last time at the hour of long shadows and pale, pink, reflected lights, as he had almost always seen her. Destiny, however, took no account of this humble plea for poetic justice; it was his fortune to meet her on the terrace sitting under a tree, alone. It was an hour when the place was almost empty; the day was warm, but as he took his place beside her a light breeze stirred the leafy edges of the broad circle of shadow in which she sat. She looked at him with candid anxiety, and he immediately told her that he should leave Saint-Germain this evening—that he must bid her farewell. Her eye expanded and brightened for a moment as he spoke: but she said nothing, and turned her glance away towards distant Paris, as it lay twinkling and flashing through its hot exhalations. “I have a request to make of you,” he added; “that you think of me as a man who has felt much and claimed little.”

She drew a long breath, which almost suggested pain. “I can’t think of you as unhappy. That is impossible. You have a life to lead, you have duties, talents, and interests. I shall hear of your career. And then,” she continued after a pause, and with the deepest seriousness,

“one can’t be unhappy through having a better opinion of a friend, instead of a worse.”

For a moment he failed to understand her. “Do you mean that there can be varying degrees in my opinion of you?”

She rose and pushed away her chair. “I mean,” she said quickly, “that it’s better to have done nothing in bitterness—nothing in passion.” And she began to walk.

Longmore followed her, without answering. But he took off his hat, and with his pocket-handkerchief wiped his forehead. “Where shall you go? what shall you do?” he asked at last, abruptly.

“Do? I shall do as I have always done—except perhaps that I shall go for a while to Auvergne.”

“I shall go to America. I have done with Europe for the present.”

She glanced at him as he walked beside her after he had spoken these words, and then bent her eyes for a long time on the ground. At last, seeing that she was going far, she stopped and put out her hand. “Good-bye,” she said; “may you have all the happiness you deserve!”

He took her hand and looked at her, but something was passing in him that made it impossible to return her hand’s light pressure. Something of infinite value was floating past him, and he had taken an oath not to raise a finger to stop it. It was borne by the strong current of the world’s great life, and not of his own small one. Madame de Mauves disengaged her hand, gathered her shawl, and smiled at him almost as you would do at a child you should wish to encourage. Several moments later he was still standing watching her receding figure. When it had disappeared he shook himself, walked rapidly back to his hotel, and without waiting for the evening train paid his bill and departed.

Later in the day M. de Mauves came into his wife’s drawing-room, where she sat waiting to be summoned to dinner. He was dressed with a scrupulous freshness

which seemed to indicate an intention of dining out. He walked up and down for some moments in silence, then rang the bell for a servant, and went out into the hall to meet him. He ordered the carriage to take him to the station, paused a moment with his hand on the knob of the door, dismissed the servant angrily as the latter lingered observing him, re-entered the drawing-room, resumed his restless walk, and at last stopped abruptly before his wife, who had taken up a book. "May I ask the favour," he said with evident effort, in spite of a forced smile of easy courtesy, "of having a question answered?"

"It's a favour I never refused," Madame de Mauves replied.

"Very true. Do you expect this evening a visit from Mr. Longmore?"

"Mr. Longmore," said his wife, "has left Saint-Germain." M. de Mauves started and his smile expired.

"Mr. Longmore," his wife continued, "has gone to America."

M. de Mauves stared a moment, flushed deeply, and turned away. Then recovering himself—"Had anything happened?" he asked. "Had he a sudden call?"

But his question received no answer. At the same moment the servant threw open the door and announced dinner; Madame Clairin rustled in, rubbing her white hands, Madame de Mauves passed silently into the dining-room, and he stood frowning and wondering. Before long he went out upon the terrace and continued his uneasy walk. At the end of a quarter of an hour the servant came to inform him that the carriage was at the door. "Send it away," he said curtly. "I shall not use it." When the ladies had half finished dinner he went in and joined them, with a formal apology to his wife for his tardiness.

The dishes were brought back, but he hardly tasted them; on the other hand, he drank a great deal of wine.

There was little talk ; what there was, was supplied by Madame Clairin. Twice she saw her brother's eye fixed on her own, over his wine-glass, with a piercing, questioning glance. She replied by an elevation of the eyebrows, which did the office of a shrug of the shoulders. M. de Mauves was left alone to finish his wine ; he sat over it for more than an hour, and let the darkness gather about him. At last the servant came in with a letter and lighted a candle. The letter was a telegram, which M. de Mauves, when he had read it, burnt at the candle. After five minutes' meditation he wrote a message on the back of a visiting-card and gave it to the servant to carry to the office. The man knew quite as much as his master suspected about the lady to whom the telegram was addressed ; but its contents puzzled him ; they consisted of the single word, "*Impossible.*" As the evening passed without her brother re-appearing in the drawing-room, Madame Clairin came to him where he sat by his solitary candle. He took no notice of her presence for some time ; but he was the one person to whom she allowed this license. At last, speaking in a peremptory tone, "The American has gone home at an hour's notice," he said. "What does it mean?"

Madame Clairin now gave free play to the shrug she had been obliged to suppress at the table. "It means that I have a sister-in-law whom I have not the honour to understand."

He said nothing more, and silently allowed her to depart, as if it had been her duty to provide him with an explanation, and he was disgusted with her levity. When she had gone he went into the garden and walked up and down, smoking. He saw his wife sitting alone on the terrace, but remained below strolling along the narrow paths. He remained a long time. It became late, and Madame de Mauves disappeared. Towards midnight he dropped upon a bench, tired, with a kind of angry sigh. It was sinking into his mind that he,

too, did not understand Madame Clairin's sister-in-law.

Longmore was obliged to wait a week in London for a ship. It was very hot, and he went out one day to Richmond. In the garden of the hotel at which he dined he met his friend Mrs. Draper, who was staying there. She made eager inquiry about Madame de Mauves ; but Longmore at first, as they sat looking out at the famous view of the Thames, parried her questions and confined himself to small-talk. At last she said she was afraid he had something to conceal ; whereupon, after a pause, he asked her if she remembered recommending him, in the letter she sent to him at Saint-Germain, to draw the sadness from her friend's smile. "The last I saw of her was her smile," said he—"when I bade her good-bye."

"I remember urging you to 'console' her," Mrs. Draper answered, "and I wondered afterwards whether—a model of discretion as you are—I had not given you rather foolish advice."

"She has her consolation in herself," he said ; "she needs none that any one else can offer her. That's for troubles for which—be it more, be it less—our own folly has to answer. Madame de Mauves has not a grain of folly left."

"Ah, don't say that !" murmured Mrs. Draper. "Just a little folly is very graceful."

Longmore rose to go, with a quick nervous movement. "Don't talk of grace," he said, "till you have measured her reason !"

For two years after his return to America he heard nothing of Madame de Mauves. That he thought of her intently, constantly, I need hardly say ; most people wondered why such a clever young man should not "devote" himself to something ; but to himself he seemed absorbingly occupied. He never wrote to her ; he believed that she preferred it. At last he heard that

Mrs. Draper had come home, and he immediately called on her. "Of course," she said, after the first greetings, "you are dying for news of Madame de Mauves. Prepare yourself for something strange. I heard from her two or three times during the year after your return. She left Saint-Germain and went to live in the country, on some old property of her husband's. She wrote me very kind little notes, but I felt somehow that—in spite of what you said about 'consolation'—they were the notes of a very sad woman. The only advice I could have given her was to leave her wretch of a husband and come back to her own land and her own people. But this I didn't feel free to do, and yet it made me so miserable not to be able to help her that I preferred to let our correspondence die a natural death. I had no news of her for a year. Last summer, however, I met at Vichy a clever young Frenchman whom I accidentally learned to be a friend of Euphemia's charming sister-in-law, Madame Clairin. I lost no time in asking him what he knew about Madame de Mauves—a countrywoman of mine and an old friend. 'I congratulate you on possessing her friendship,' he answered. 'That's the charming little woman who killed her husband.' You may imagine that I promptly asked for an explanation, and he proceeded to relate to me what he called the whole story. M. de Mauves had *fait quelques folies*, which his wife had taken absurdly to heart. He had repented and asked her forgiveness, which she had inexorably refused. She was very pretty, and severity, apparently, suited her style; for whether or no her husband had been in love with her before, he fell madly in love with her now. He was the proudest man in France, but he had begged her on his knees to be readmitted to favour. All in vain! She was stone, she was ice, she was outraged virtue. People noticed a great change in him; he gave up society, ceased to care for anything, looked shockingly. One fine day they learned that he had blown out his

brains. My friend had the story, of course, from Madame Clairin."

Longmore was strongly moved, and his first impulse after he had recovered his composure was to return immediately to Europe. But several years have passed, and he still lingers at home. The truth is, that in the midst of all the ardent tenderness of his memory of Madame de Mauves, he has become conscious of a singular feeling—a feeling for which awe would be hardly too strong a name.

THE END.

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